

# 半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 1

## SERVING IN THE DARK

*By* KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

# 半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN



*Lifelong friends, with the Same Dreams,*
*Striving to Grow into a Rising River.*


story
**KAZUO KOIKE**

art
**GOSEKI KOJIMA**



®
**DARK HORSE MANGA™**

translation
**NAOMI KOKUBO**
with assistance by **JEFF CARLSON**

lettering and retouch
**SNO CONE STUDIOS**

publisher
**MIKE RICHARDSON**

editor
**TIM ERVIN**

book design
**DARIN FABRICK**

art director
**LIA RIBACCHI**

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# 半蔵の門

# SERVING IN THE DARK

*by* KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA



VOLUME

1

*"Using your spy's technique, show me . . .*
*. . . what men and women do."*

The story is set in the Sengoku period. Ambitious to rule the country, samurai warriors are releasing ninja called *"suppa"* in great numbers full of small, trifling plots. The *suppa* who works for the Matsudaira clan is Hattori Hanzō Yasunaga of Iga. He orders his son, Hattori Hanzō Masanari, to serve Matsudaira Jirō Saburō Motonobu (later known as Ieyasu).

Motonobu, his master, is sixteen, while Masanari is fifteen. Together, they begin their long and challenging journey.

# 半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

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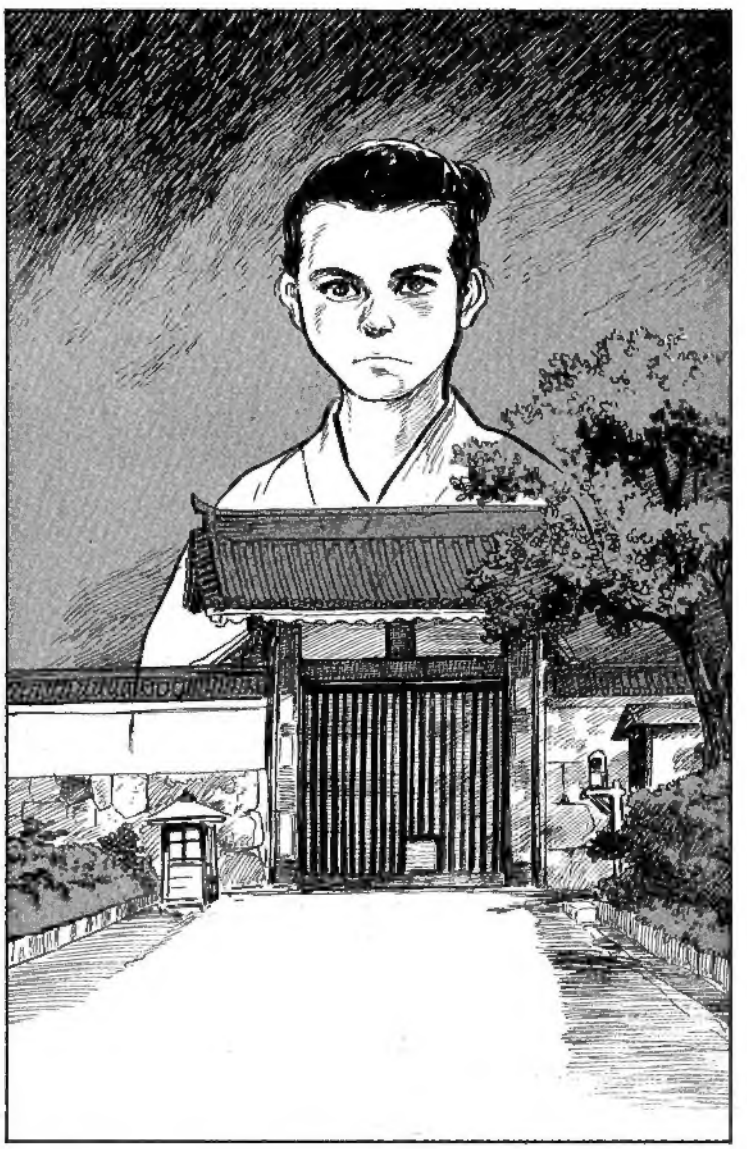
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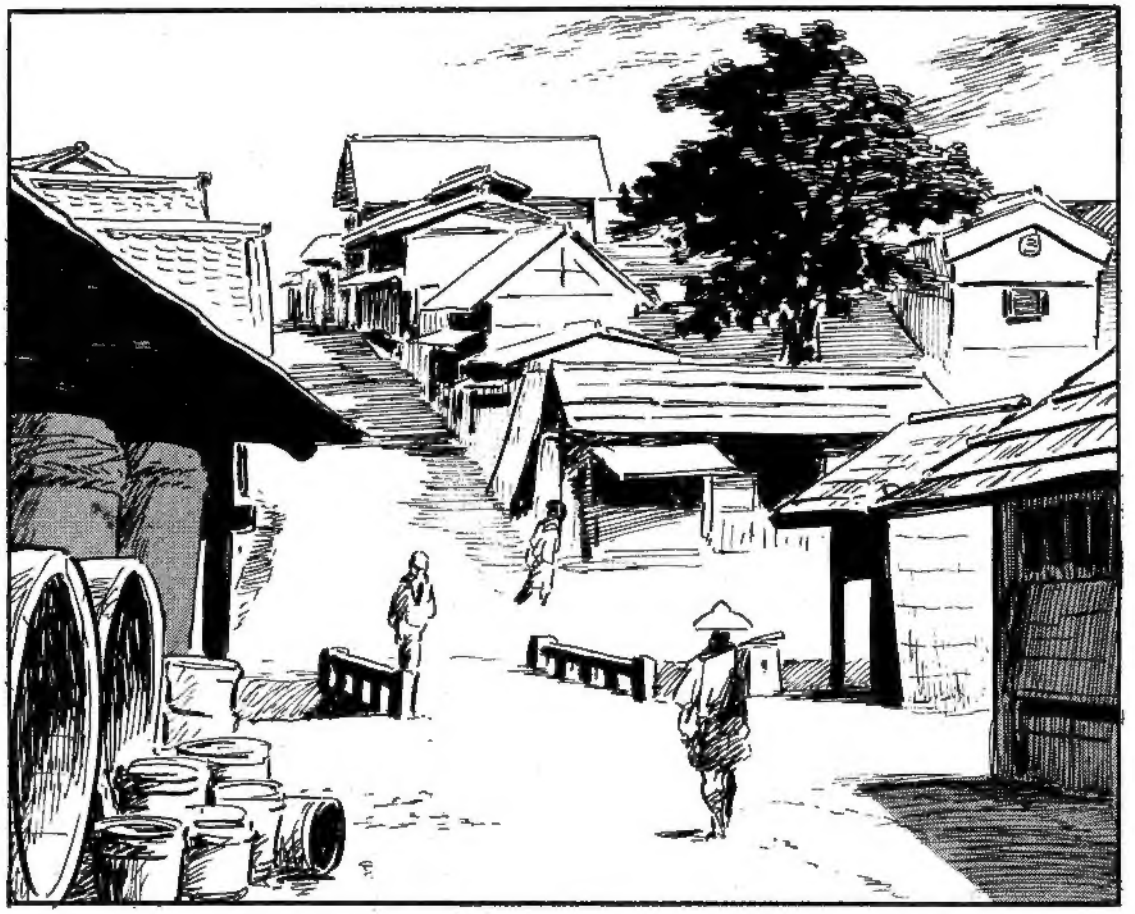
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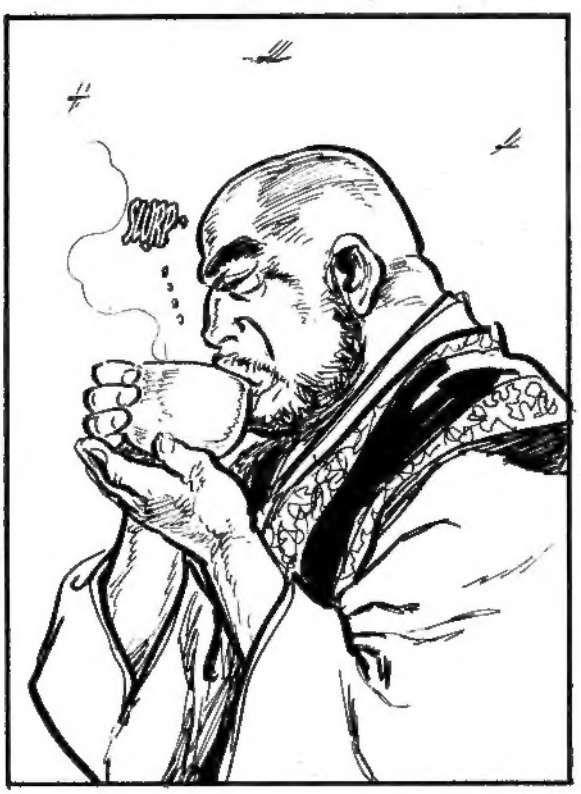
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# Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

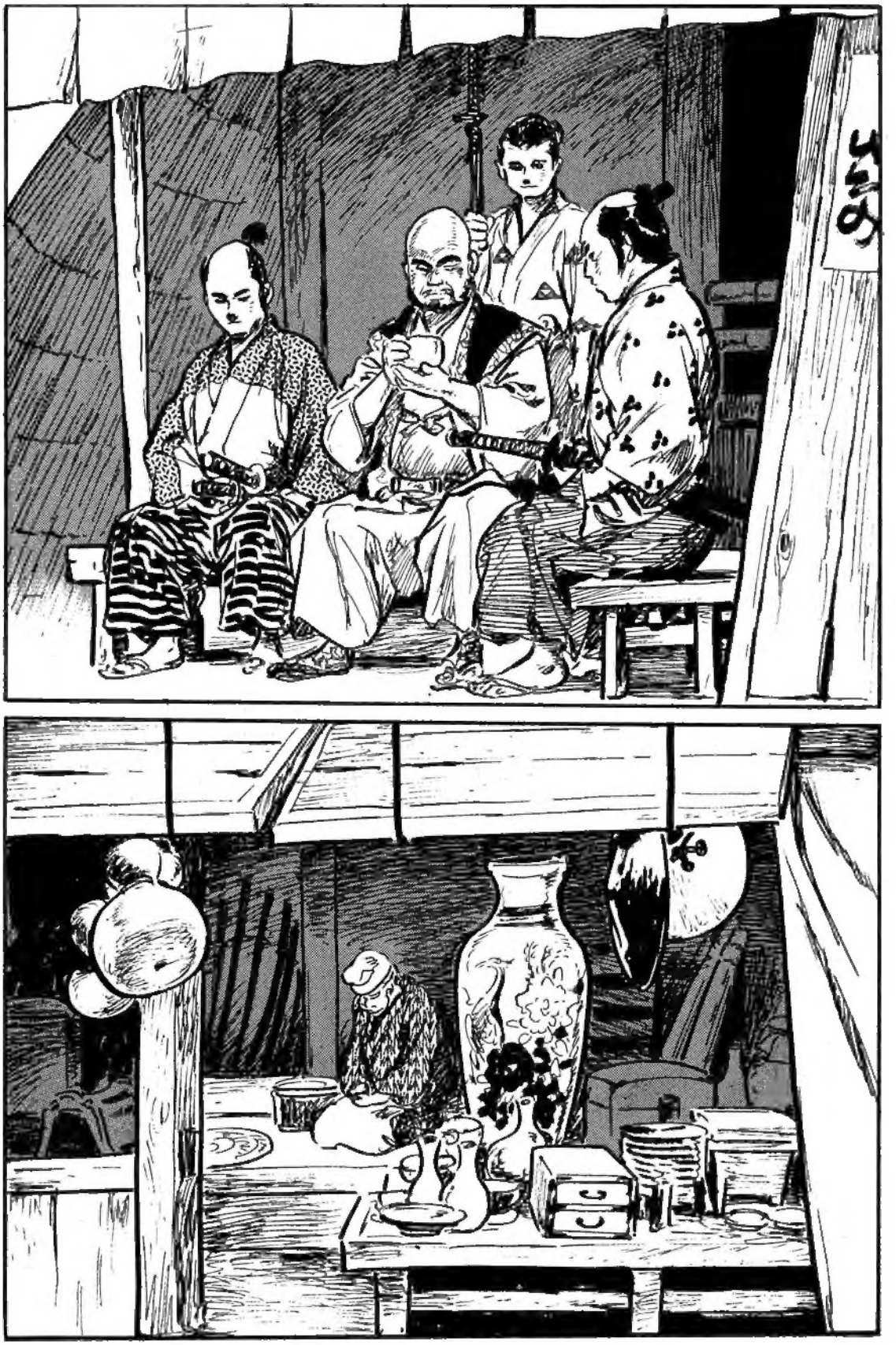
# No. 1: Suppa Un-sheathed

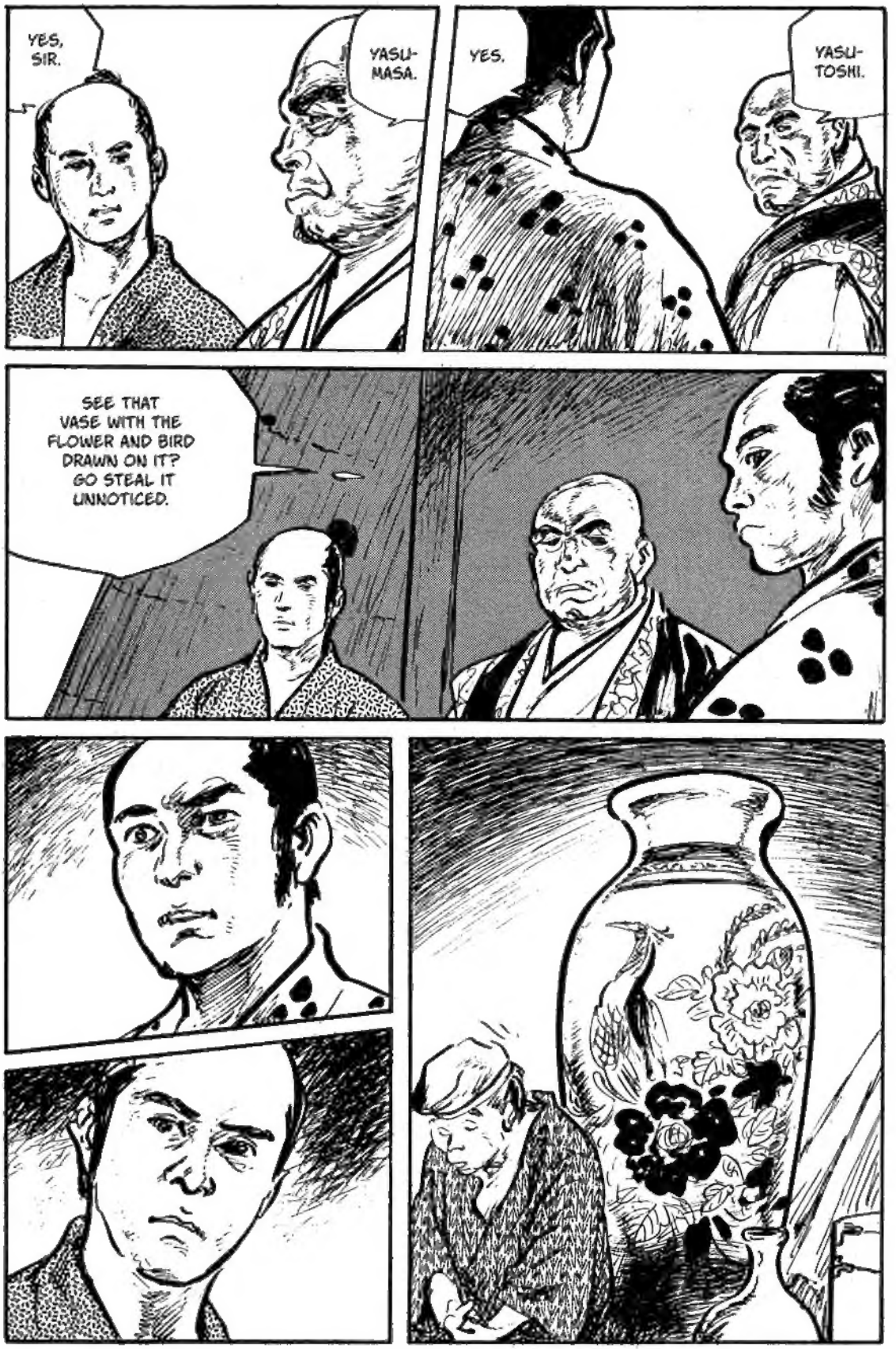


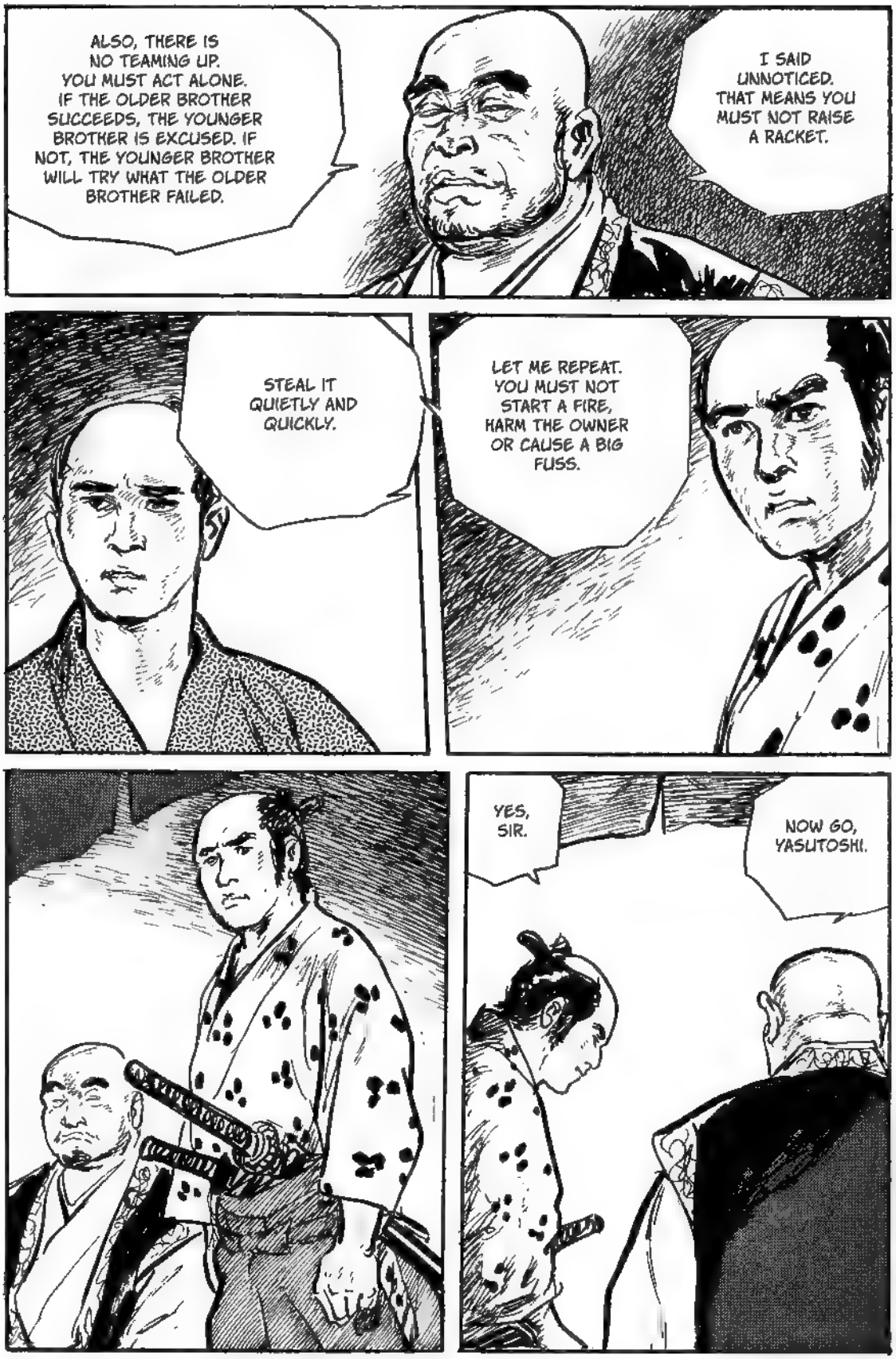



SLURP


FOOD




YES, SIR.
YASU-MASA.
YES.
YASU-TOSHI.
SEE THAT VASE WITH THE FLOWER AND BIRD DRAWN ON IT? GO STEAL IT UNNOTICED.

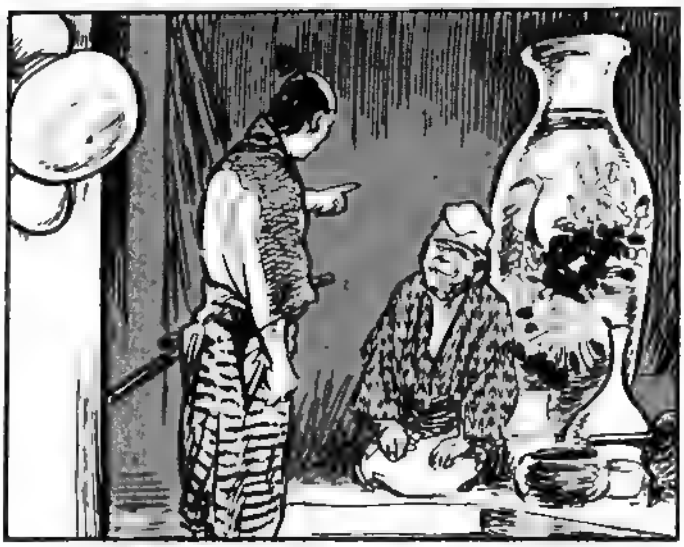

ALSO, THERE IS NO TEAMING UP. YOU MUST ACT ALONE. IF THE OLDER BROTHER SUCCEEDS, THE YOUNGER BROTHER IS EXCUSED. IF NOT, THE YOUNGER BROTHER WILL TRY WHAT THE OLDER BROTHER FAILED.
I SAID UNNOTICED. THAT MEANS YOU MUST NOT RAISE A RACKET.
STEAL IT QUIETLY AND QUICKLY.
LET ME REPEAT. YOU MUST NOT START A FIRE, HARM THE OWNER OR CAUSE A BIG FUSS.
YES, SIR.
NOW GO, YASUTOSHI.


YORDZU ANTIQUES


UNLESS I START A COMMOTION AND DRIVE THE OWNER AWAY OR LURE HIM OUT... THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO...
YES...
YASUMASA.
I'M SORRY.









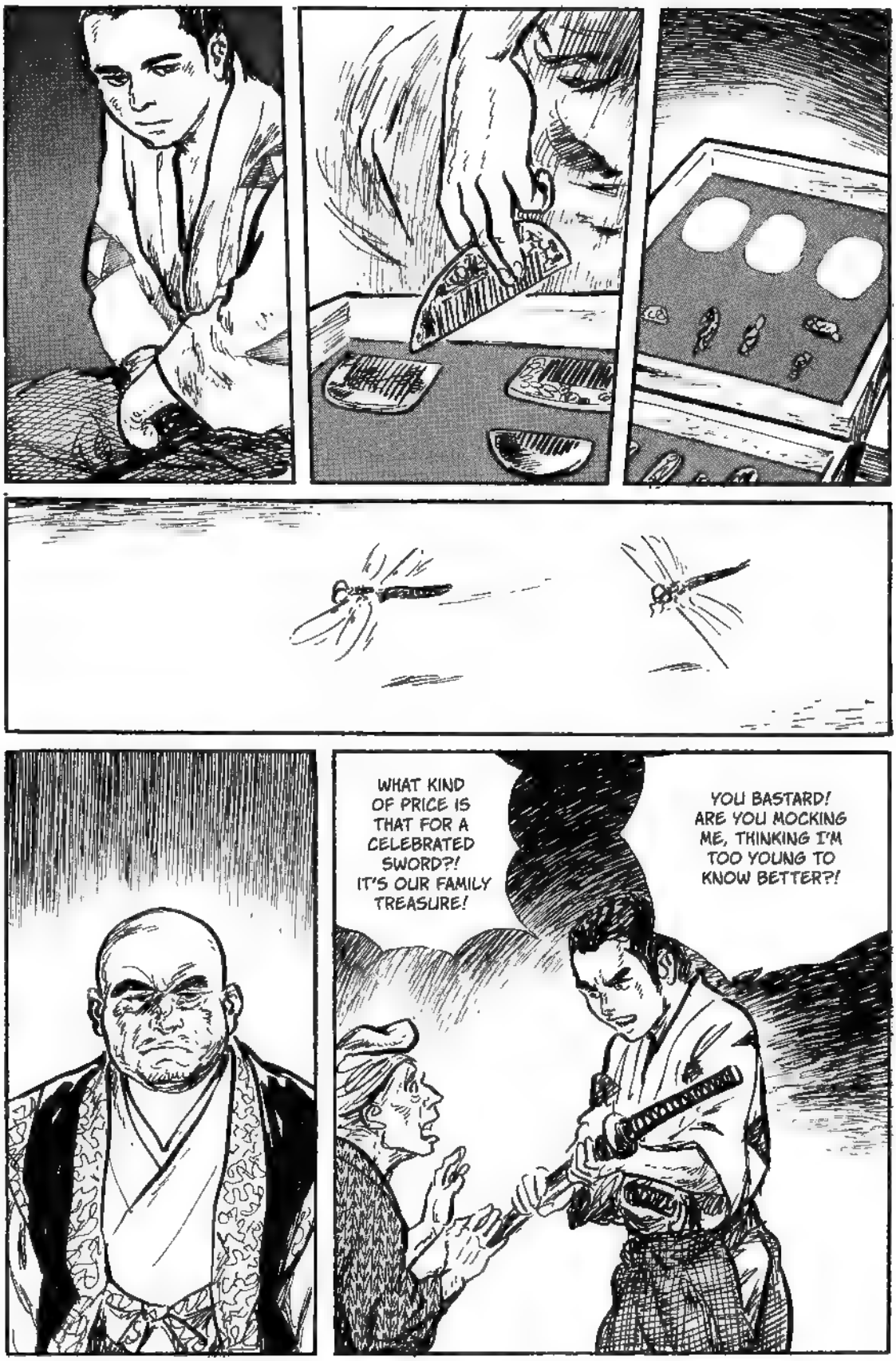


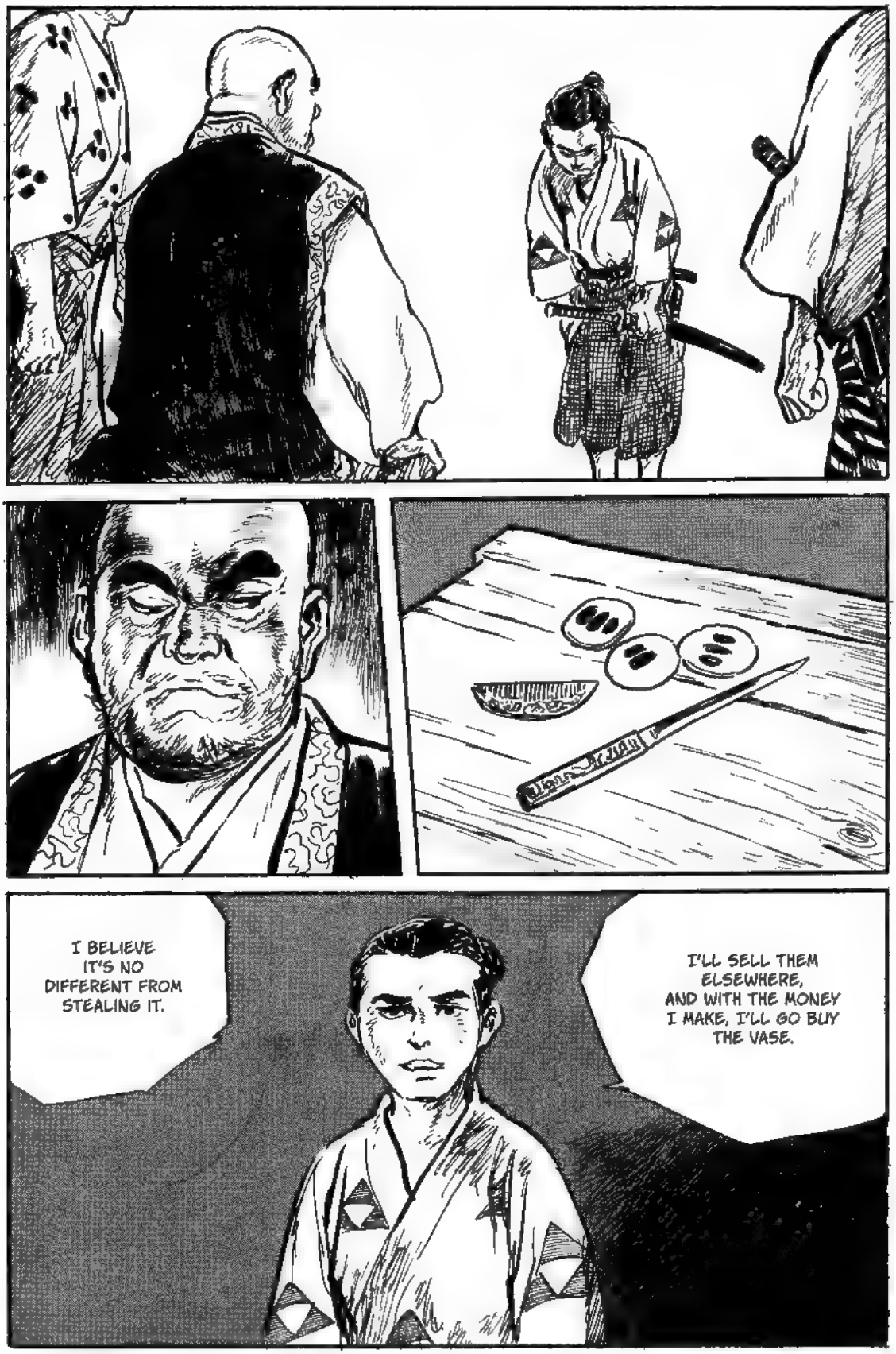

I BELIEVE ONLY WAY IS TO BREAK INTO THE STORE WITH MY MEN AFTER THE SUN SETS.
I ASKED ABOUT THE WEIGHT... IT'S TOO HEAVY FOR ONE MAN TO LIFT.
MIKAWA PROVINCE-- OKAZAKI

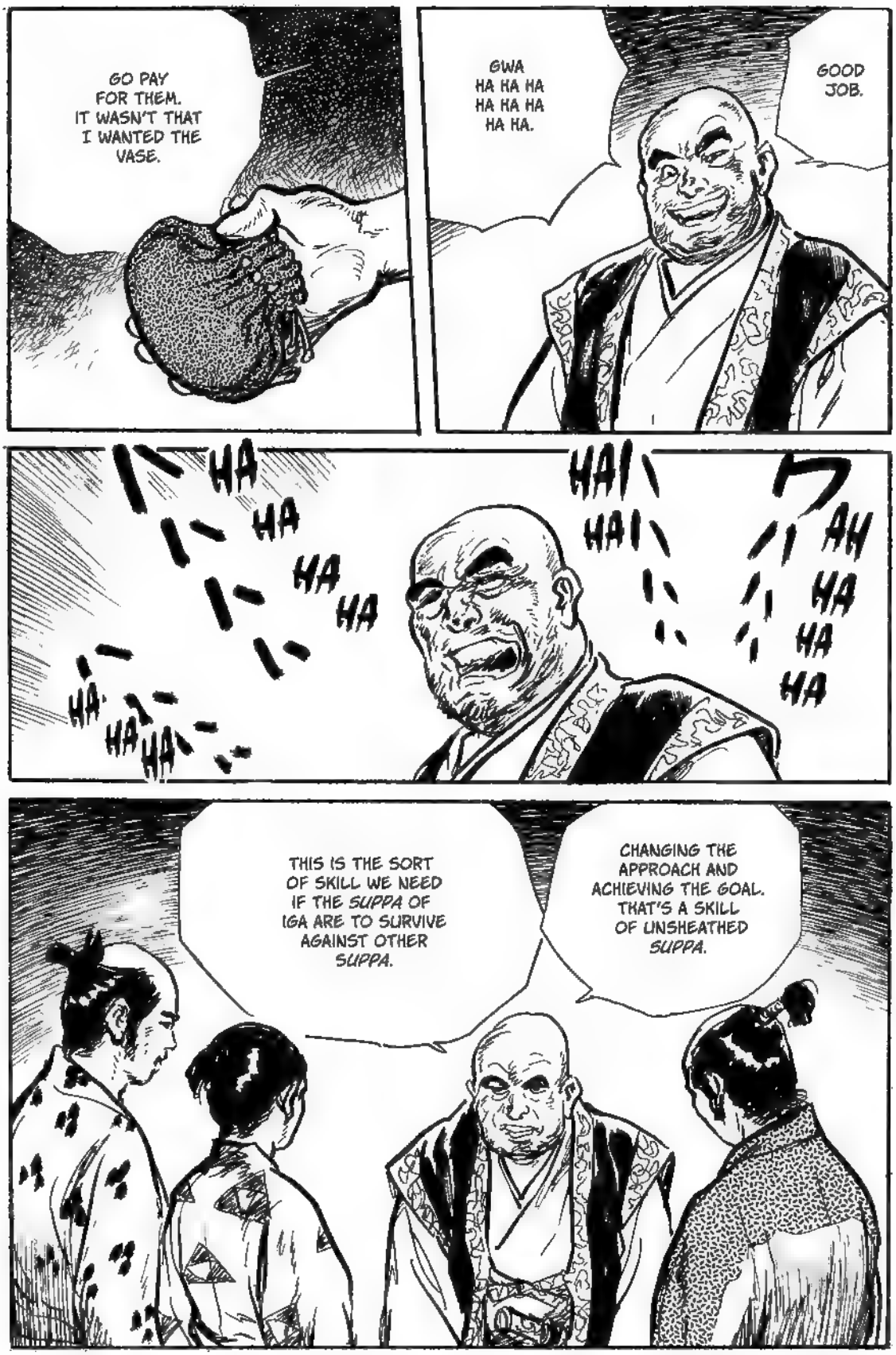

ALL RIGHT. GO.
YOU SAID THE YOUNGER BROTHER WILL TRY WHAT THE OLDER BROTHER FAILED.
DO YOU WANT TO TRY, TOO?


Y--YES, SIR.
MAKE SURE YOU PRICE IT RIGHT.
I'M HERE UNDER MY FATHER'S ORDER. I MUST BUY A SPEAR WITH THE MONEY.
WILL YOU TAKE THIS?


APPRAISE IT CAREFULLY.

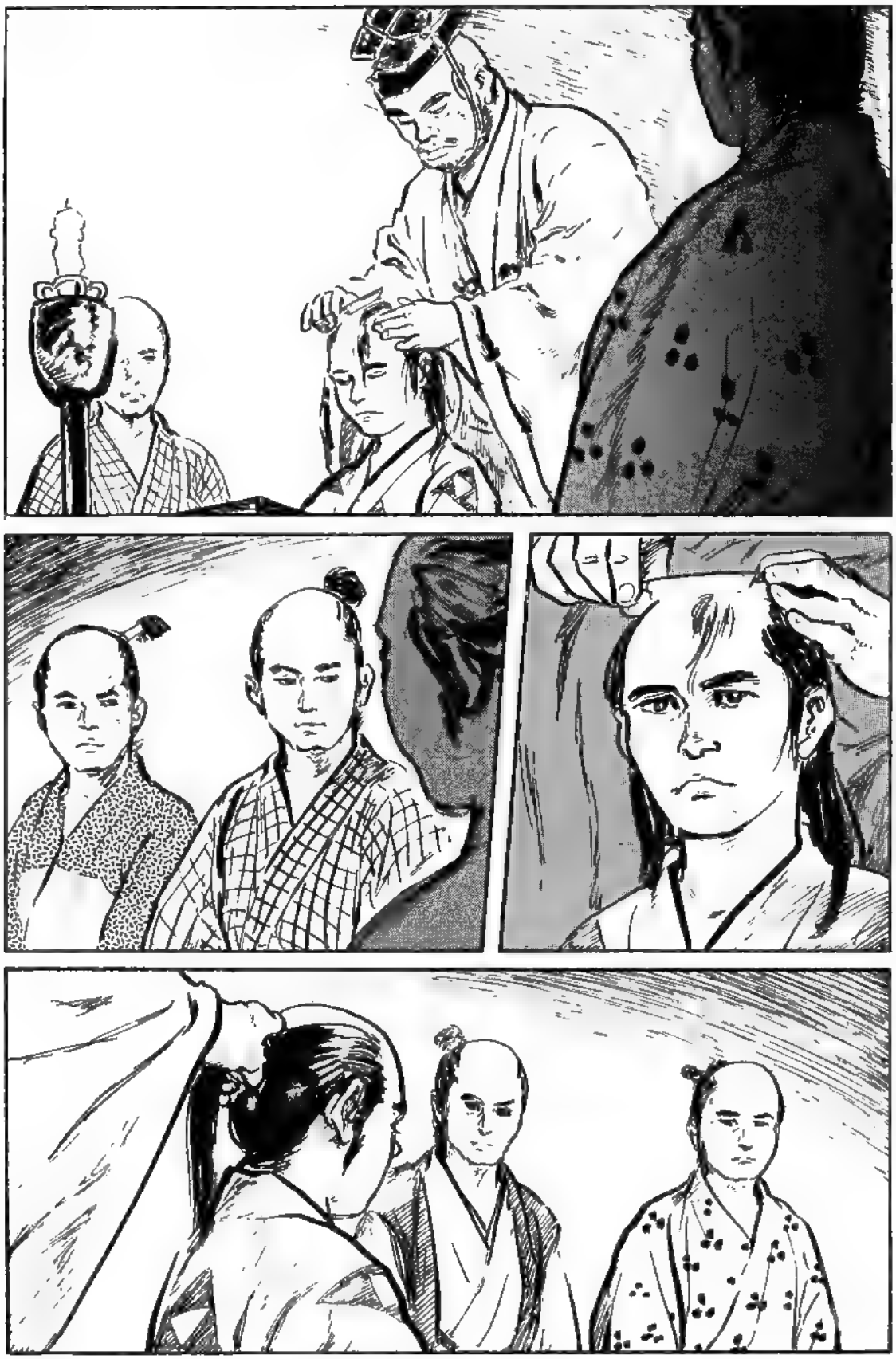

WHAT KIND OF PRICE IS THAT FOR A CELEBRATED SWORD?! IT'S OUR FAMILY TREASURE!
YOU BASTARD! ARE YOU MOCKING ME, THINKING I'M TOO YOUNG TO KNOW BETTER?!

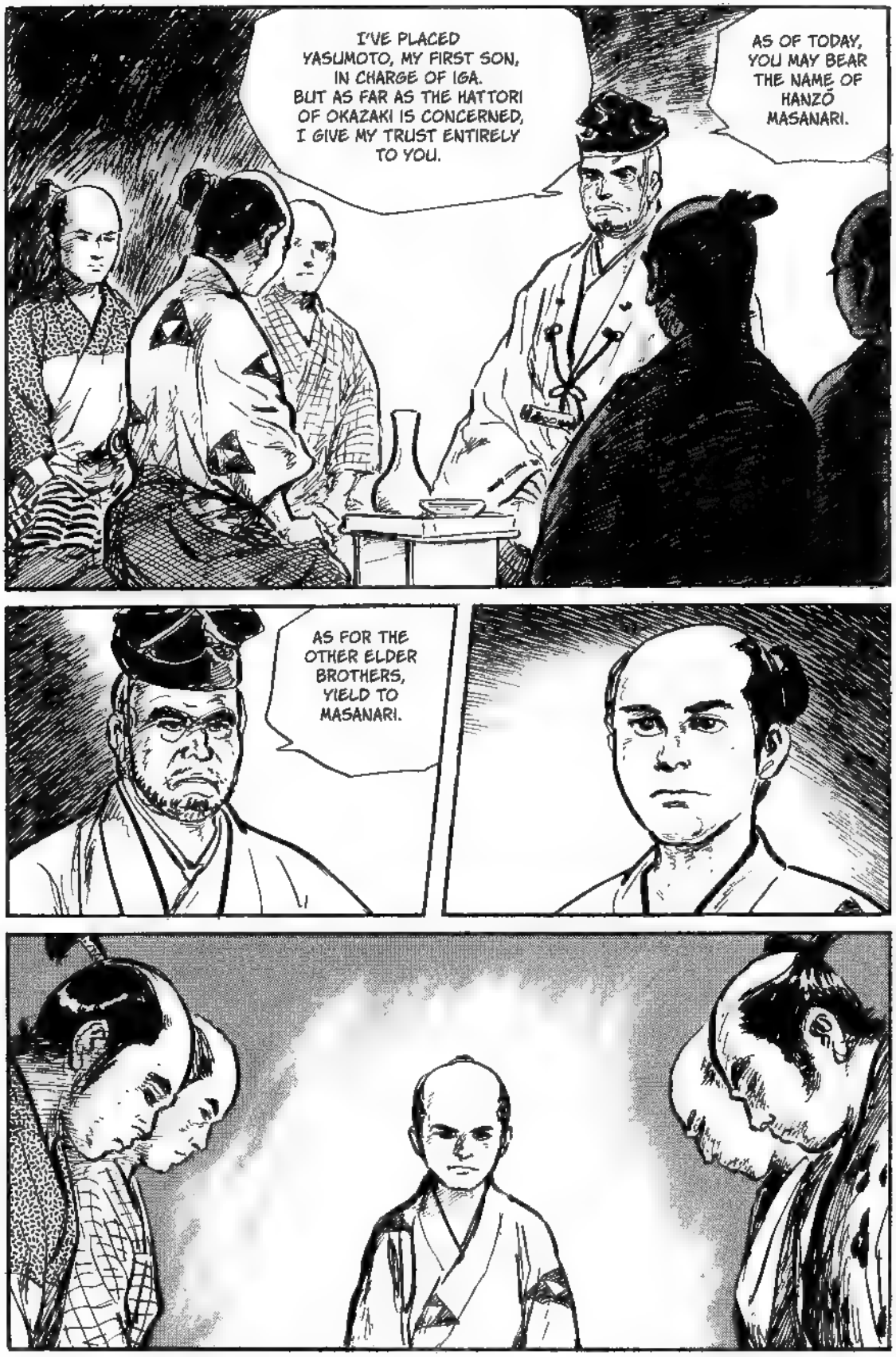

I BELIEVE IT'S NO DIFFERENT FROM STEALING IT.
I'LL SELL THEM ELSEWHERE, AND WITH THE MONEY I MAKE, I'LL GO BUY THE VASE.


GO PAY FOR THEM. IT WASN'T THAT I WANTED THE VASE.
GWA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
GOOD JOB.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
HA! HA! AH HA HA HA
THIS IS THE SORT OF SKILL WE NEED IF THE SUPPA OF IGA ARE TO SURVIVE AGAINST OTHER SUPPA.
CHANGING THE APPROACH AND ACHIEVING THE GOAL. THAT'S A SKILL OF UNSHEATHED SUPPA.



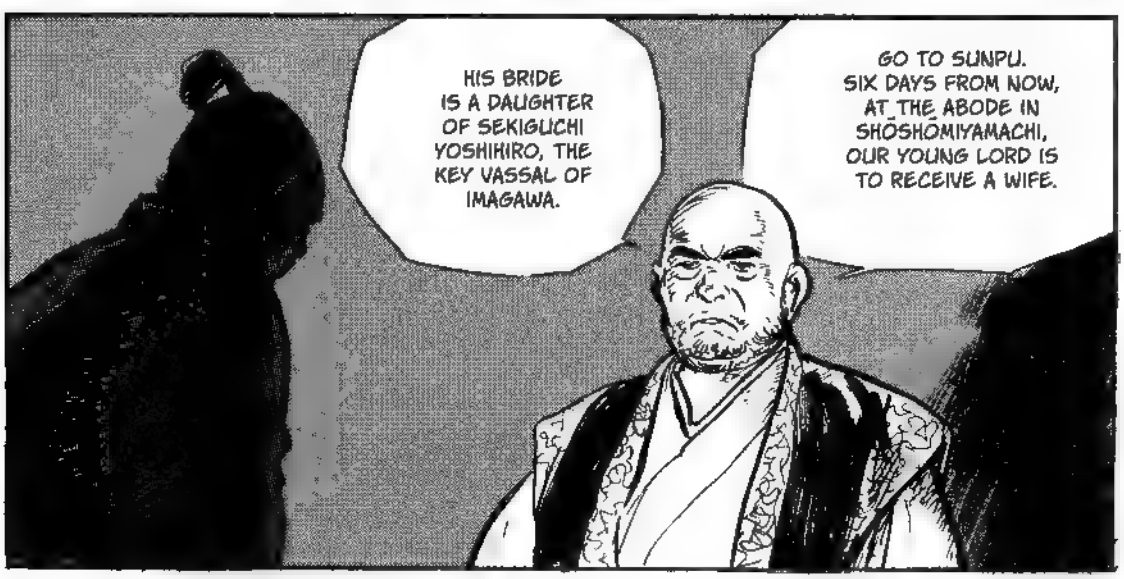


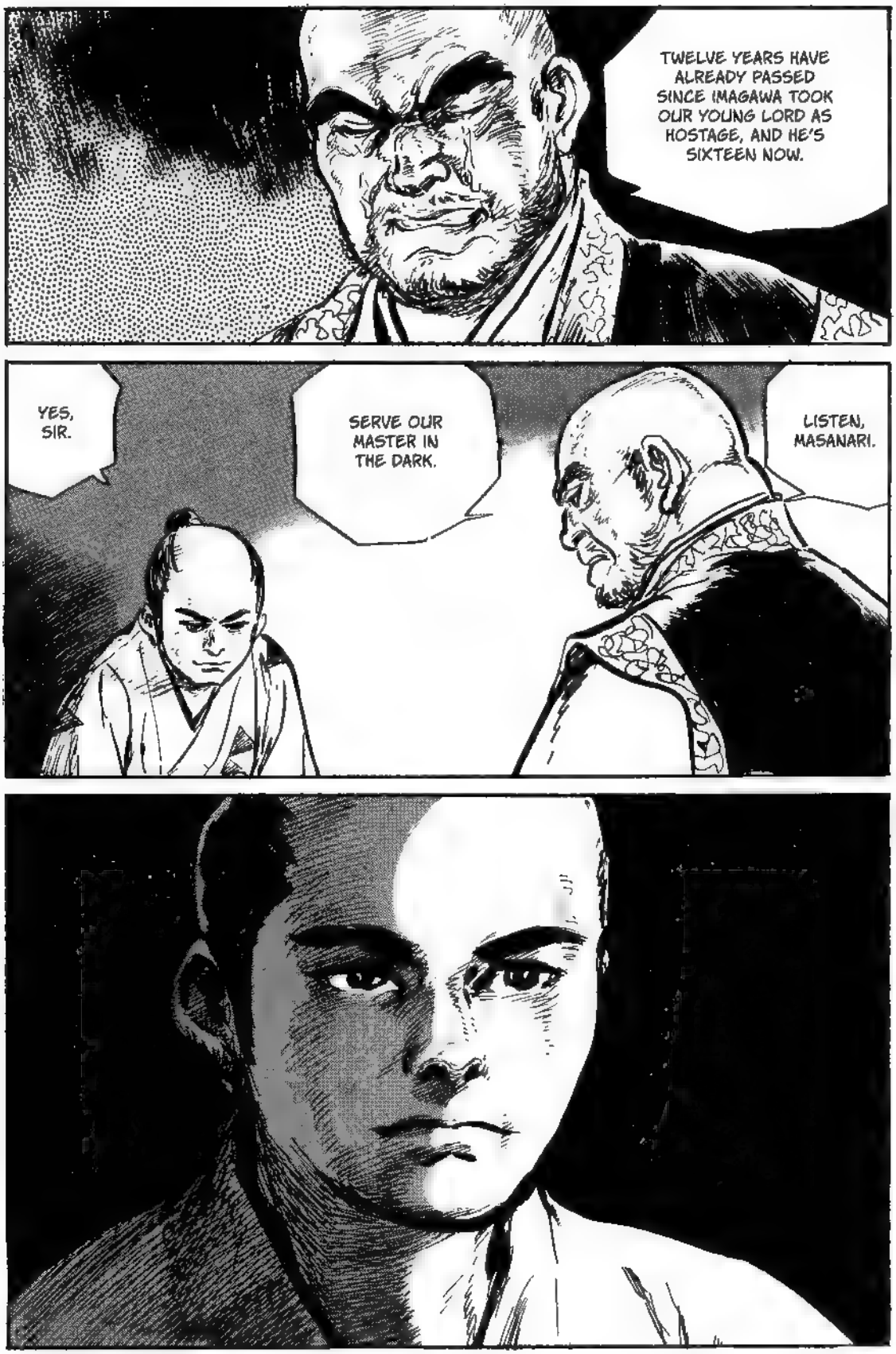



I'VE PLACED YASUMOTO, MY FIRST SON, IN CHARGE OF IGA. BUT AS FAR AS THE HATTORI OF OKAZAKI IS CONCERNED, I GIVE MY TRUST ENTIRELY TO YOU.
AS OF TODAY, YOU MAY BEAR THE NAME OF HANZŌ MASANARI.
AS FOR THE OTHER ELDER BROTHERS, YIELD TO MASANARI.



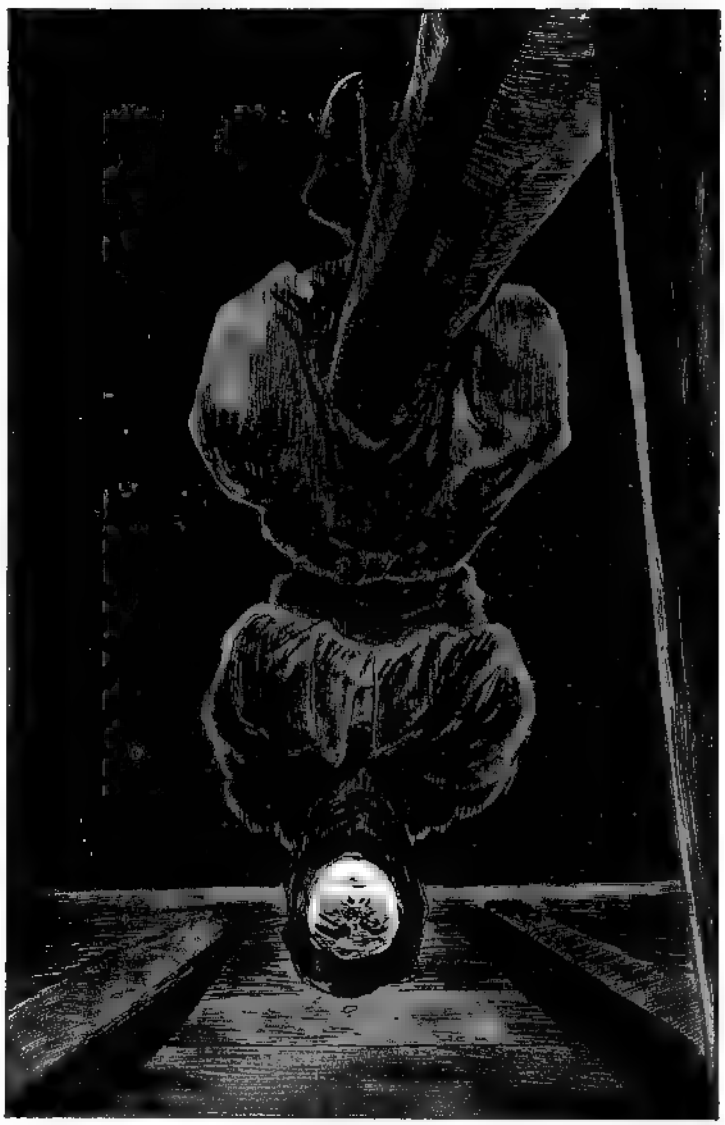

YES, SIR.
MASANARI.

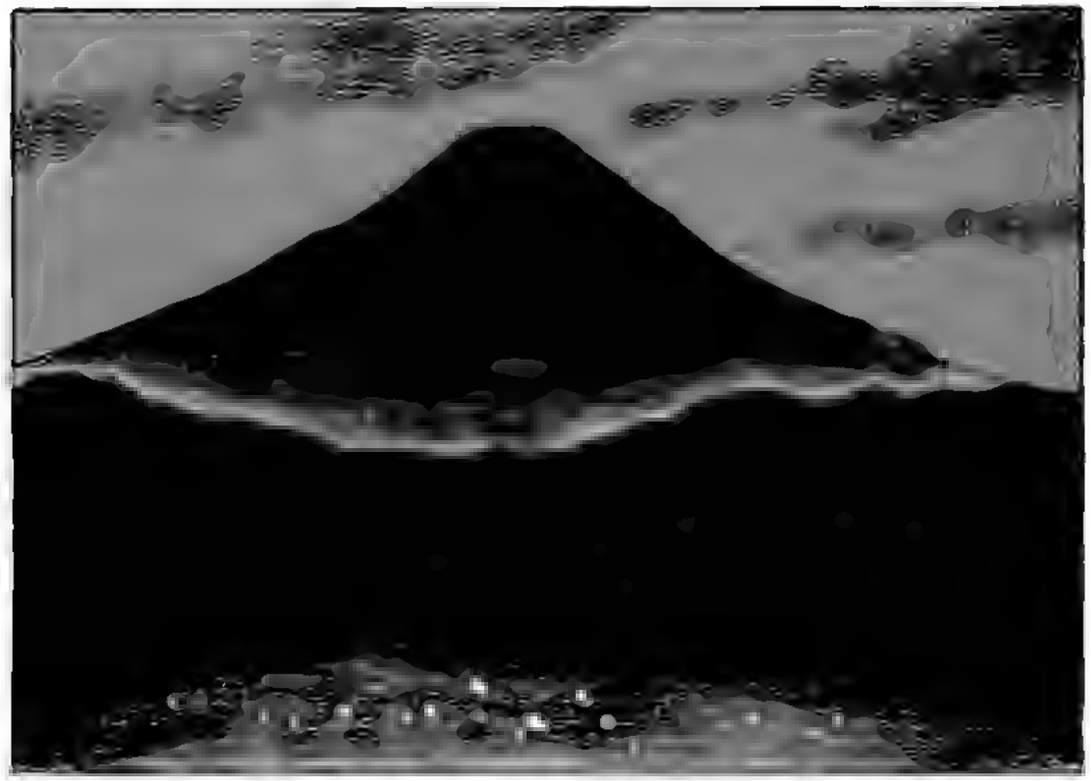

HIS BRIDE IS A DAUGHTER OF SEKIGUCHI YOSHIHIRO, THE KEY VASSAL OF IMAGAWA.
GO TO SUNPU. SIX DAYS FROM NOW, AT THE ABODE IN SHŌSHŌMIYAMACHI, OUR YOUNG LORD IS TO RECEIVE A WIFE.

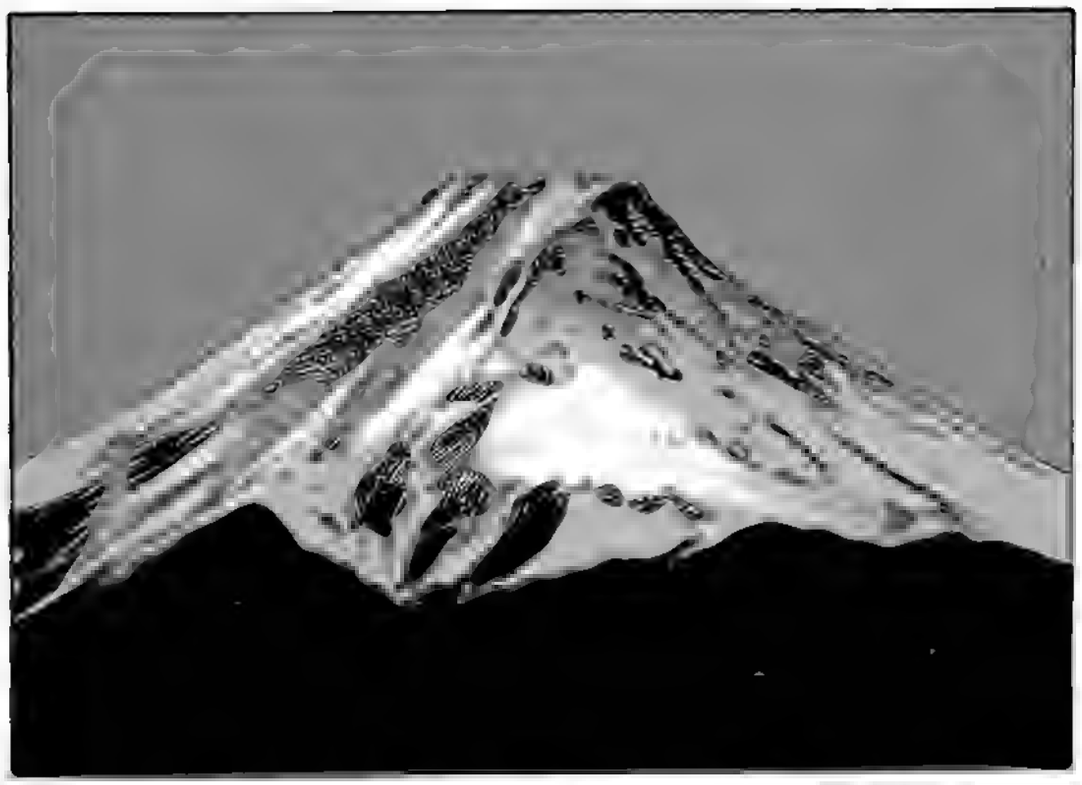

TWELVE YEARS HAVE ALREADY PASSED SINCE IMAGAWA TOOK OUR YOUNG LORD AS HOSTAGE, AND HE'S SIXTEEN NOW.
LISTEN, MASANARI.
SERVE OUR MASTER IN THE DARK.
YES, SIR.

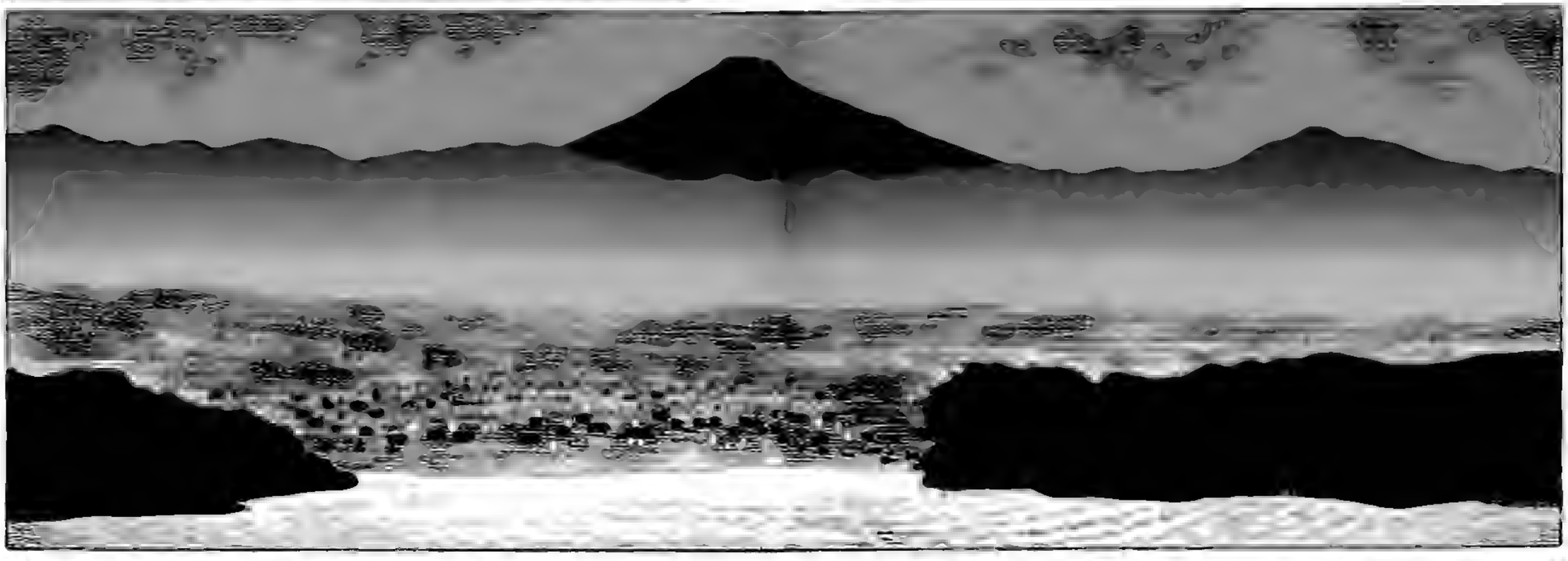
# Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

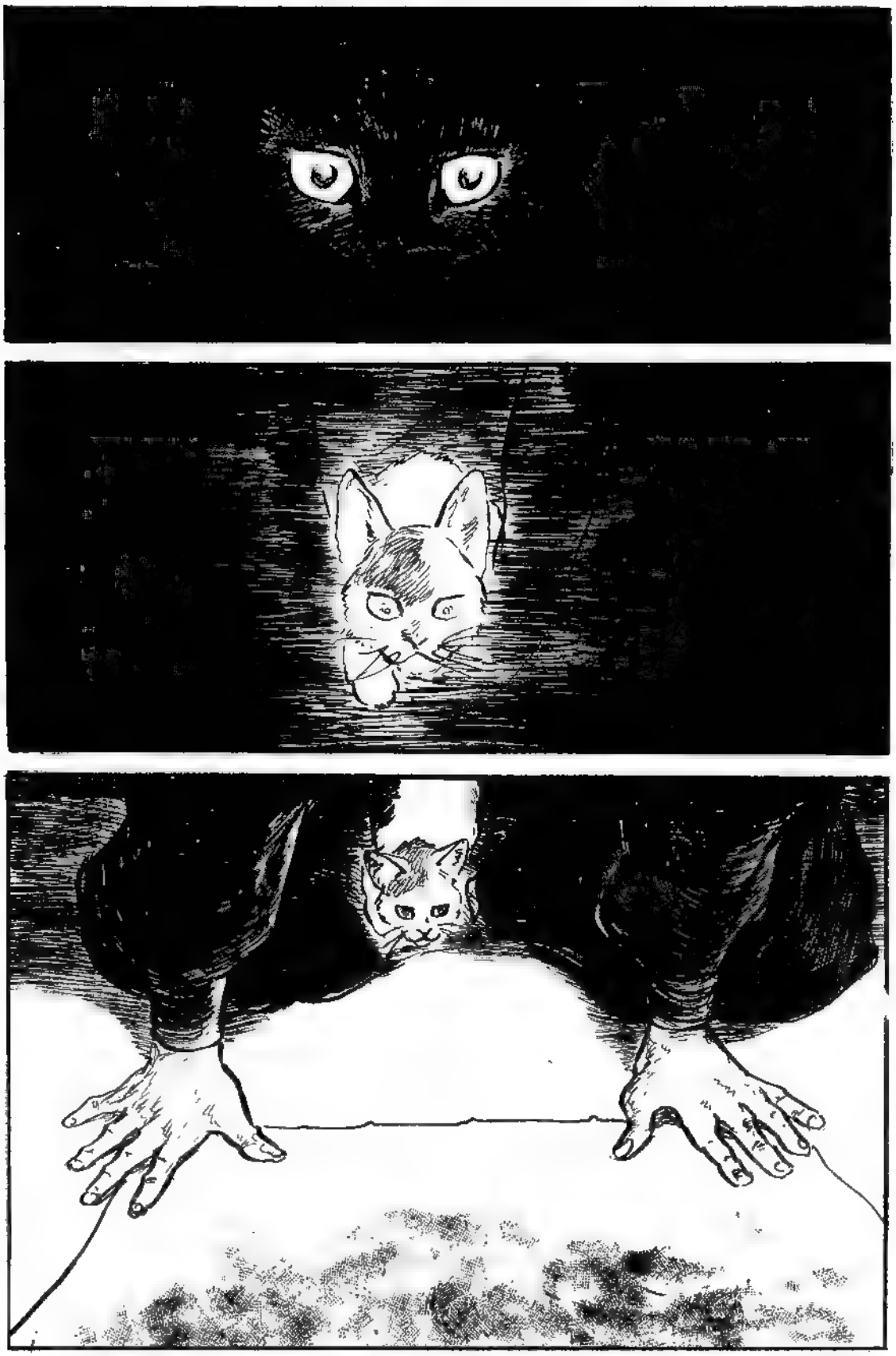
## No. 2: Serving in the Dark









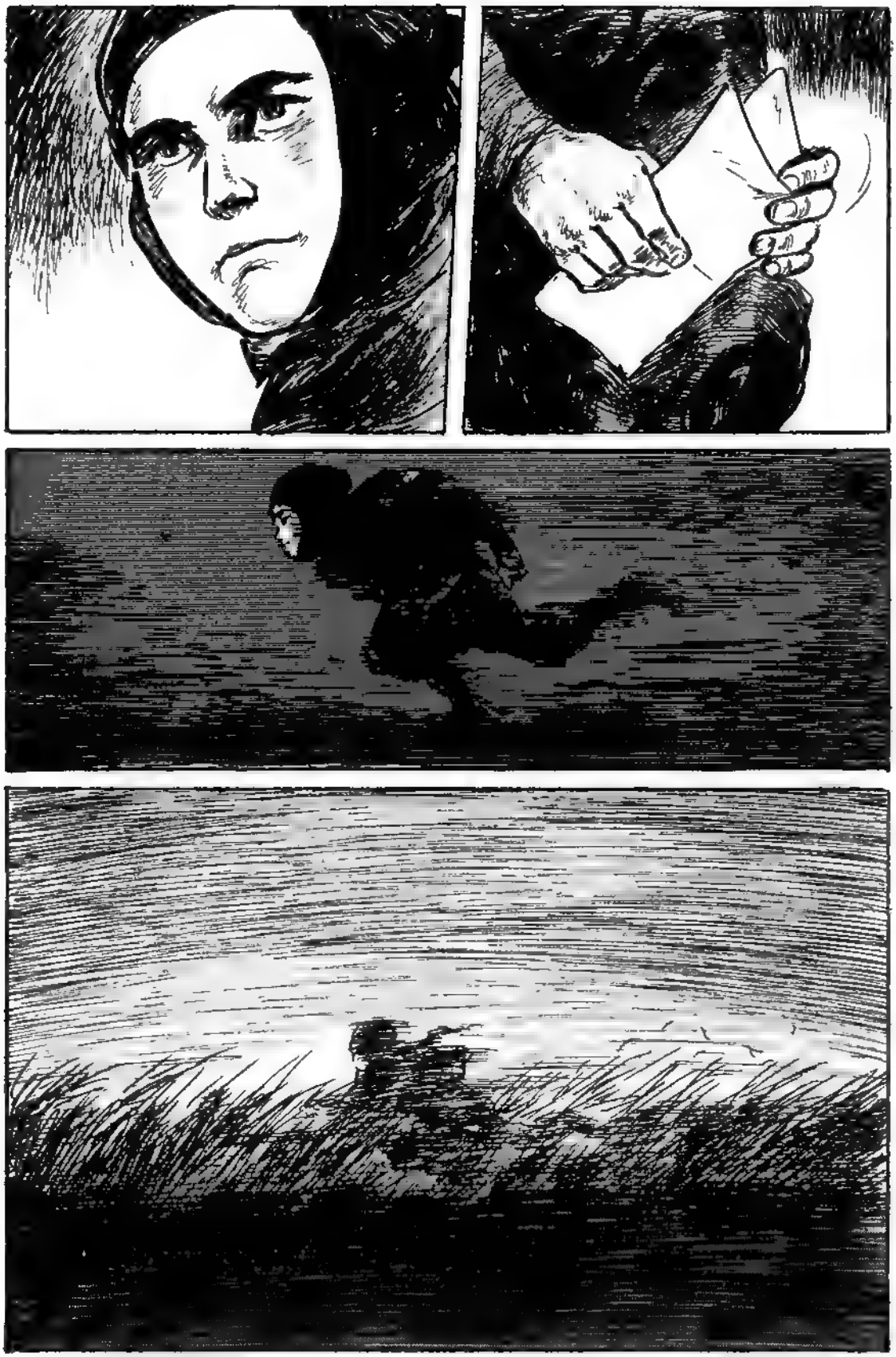


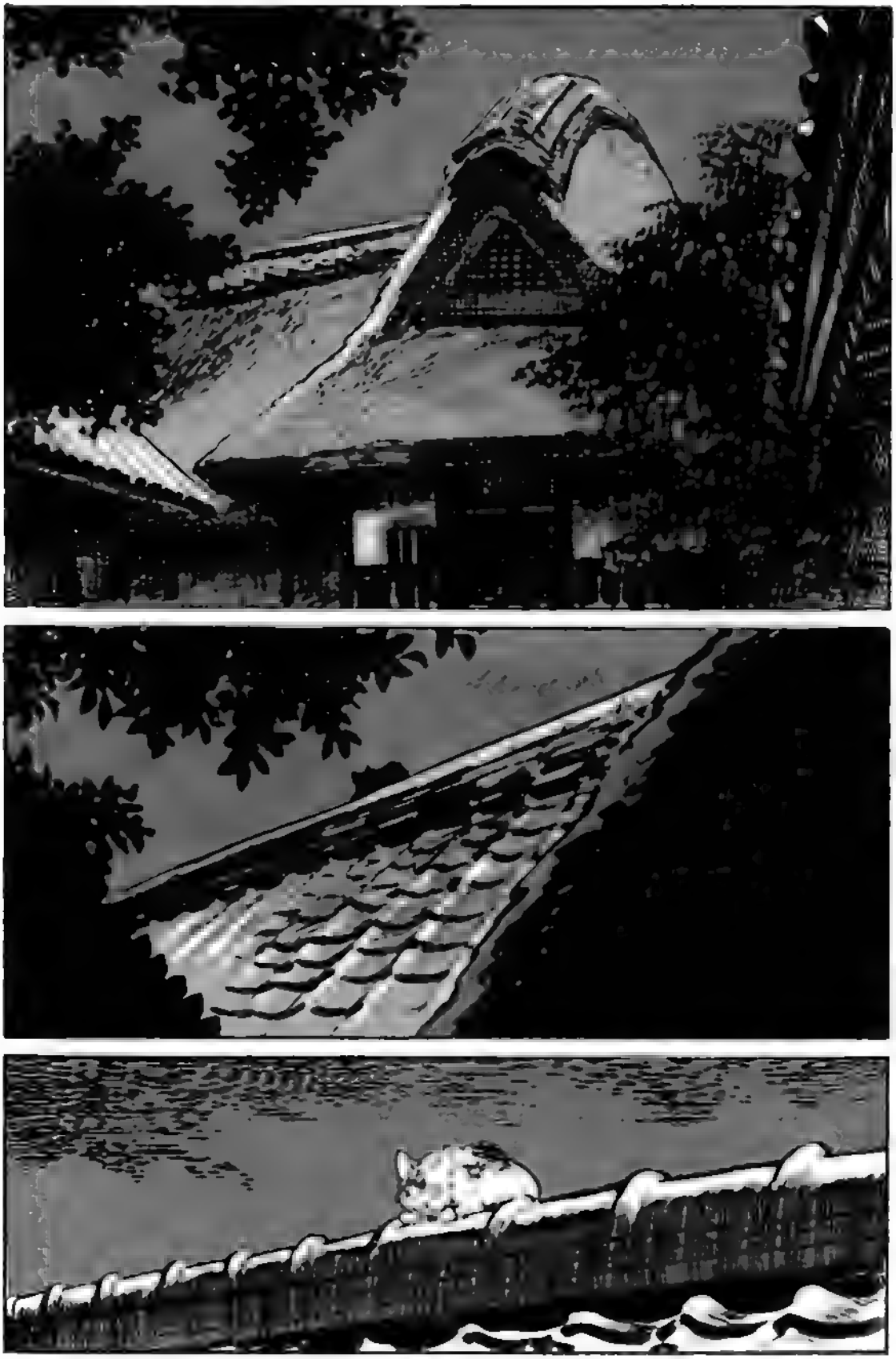

北


少将宮町
SHŌSHŌMIYAMACHI







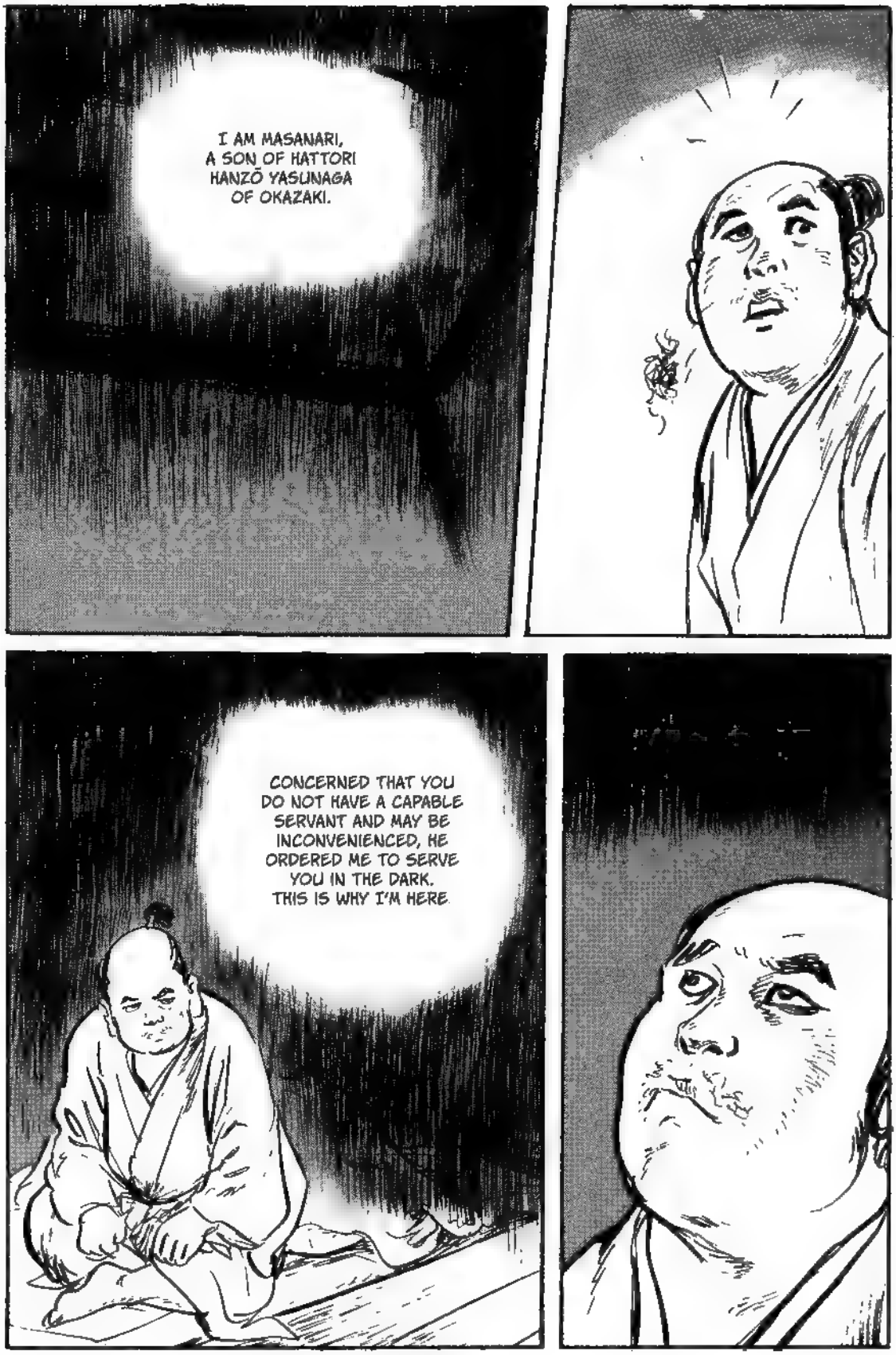





IT WAS ALMOST AUTUMN OF KŌJI YEAR THREE (1557 A.D.), AND MATSUDAIRA JIRŌ SABURŌ MOTONOBU WAS SIXTEEN.




MILORD.


I AM MASANARI,
A SON OF HATTORI
HANZŌ YASUNAGA
OF OKAZAKI.
CONCERNED THAT YOU
DO NOT HAVE A CAPABLE
SERVANT AND MAY BE
INCONVENIENCED, HE
ORDERED ME TO SERVE
YOU IN THE DARK.
THIS IS WHY I'M HERE.

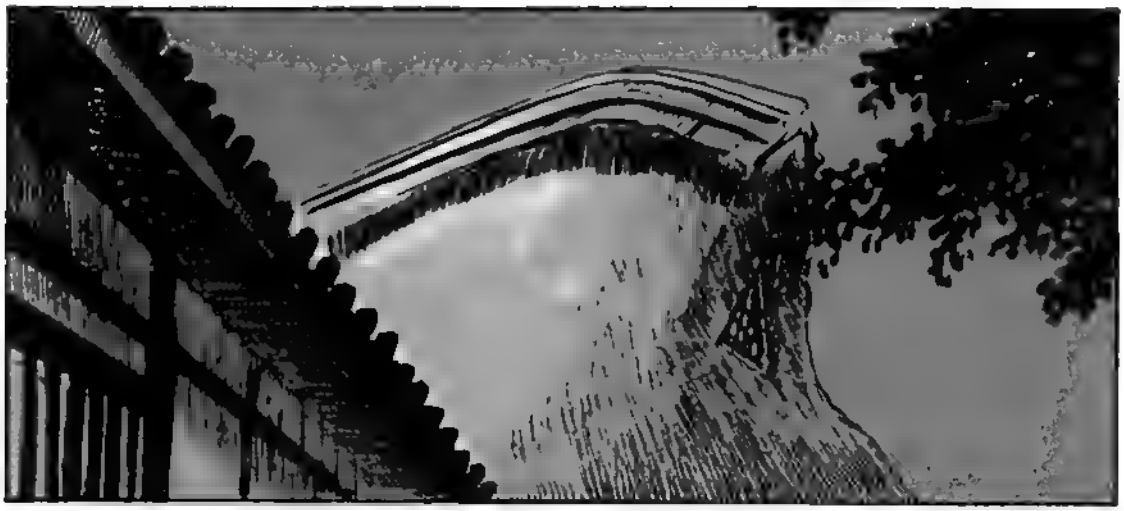

I'VE CHECKED TO BE SURE THERE'S NO ONE AROUND. SO YOU NEED NOT BE UNEASY.
I AM HANZŌ MASANARI. I WILL REMAIN BY YOUR SIDE AT ALL TIMES. REST ASSURED, AND FEEL FREE TO ORDER ME TO CARRY OUT ANY WISH.
GUARDS! THERE'S SOMEONE IN THE ROOF!
INTRUDER! INTRUDER!


GUARDS!
TMP
TMP
TMP
TMP


GET HIM!
THERE HE IS!


BAM
YOU MORON!
BASH
SLAP
YOU MAY BE A SUPPA, BUT WHAT WERE YOU THINKING, WAITING ON YOUR LORD FROM THE CEILING!?


GO TO SUNPU AGAIN. IF HE REFUSES YOU, DON'T COME BACK. JUST CUT OPEN YOUR BELLY INSTEAD!
HE WOULD NEVER CONSIDER A MAN LIKE THAT HIS SERVANT.
BUT IT'S GOOD NEWS. HEH HEH HEH.
HEE HEE HEE.
YES, SIR...
YES, HE HAS THE CALIBER TO BE A SAMURAI...
INDEED... INDEED... HE IS OUR LORD.








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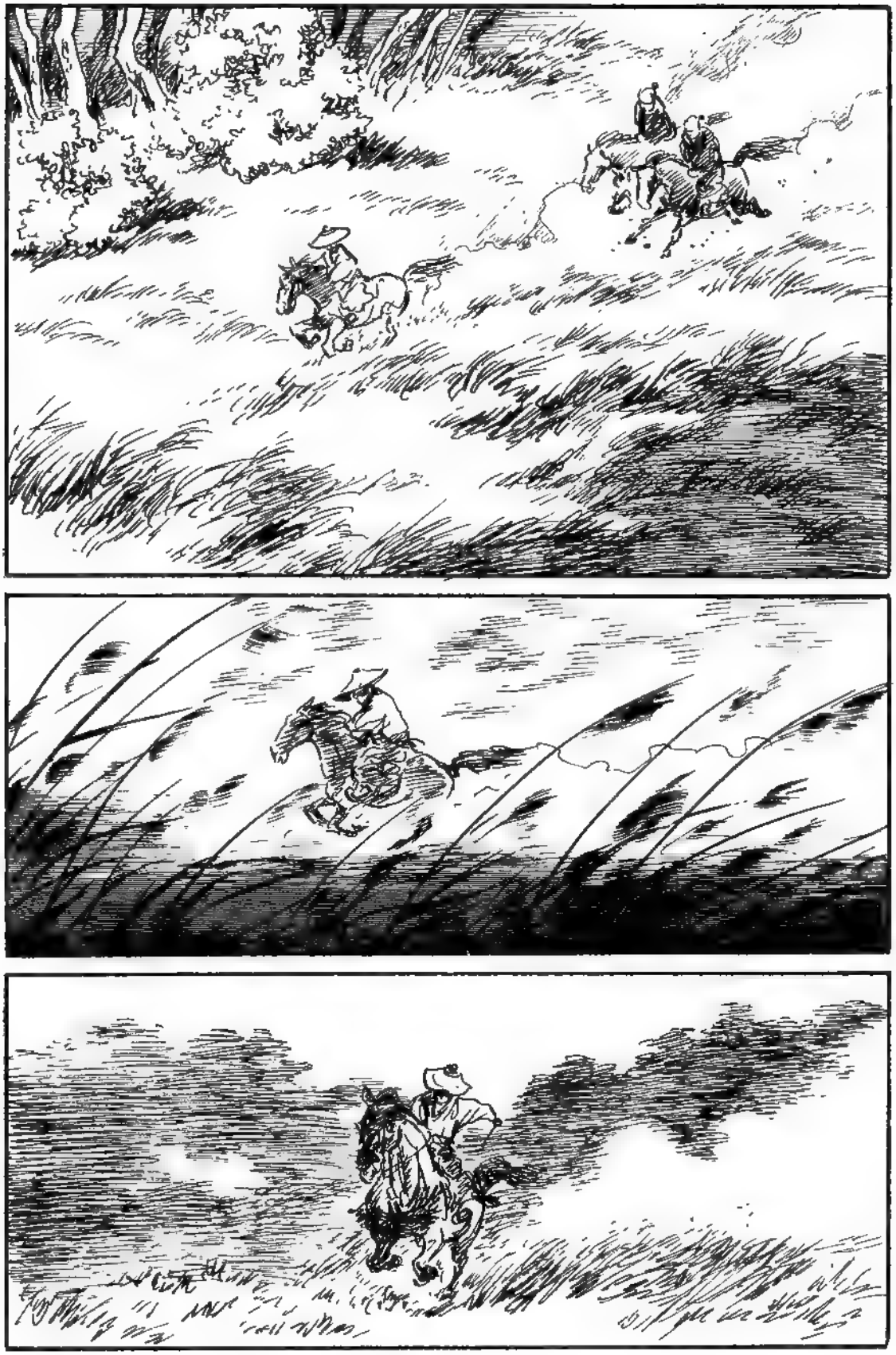


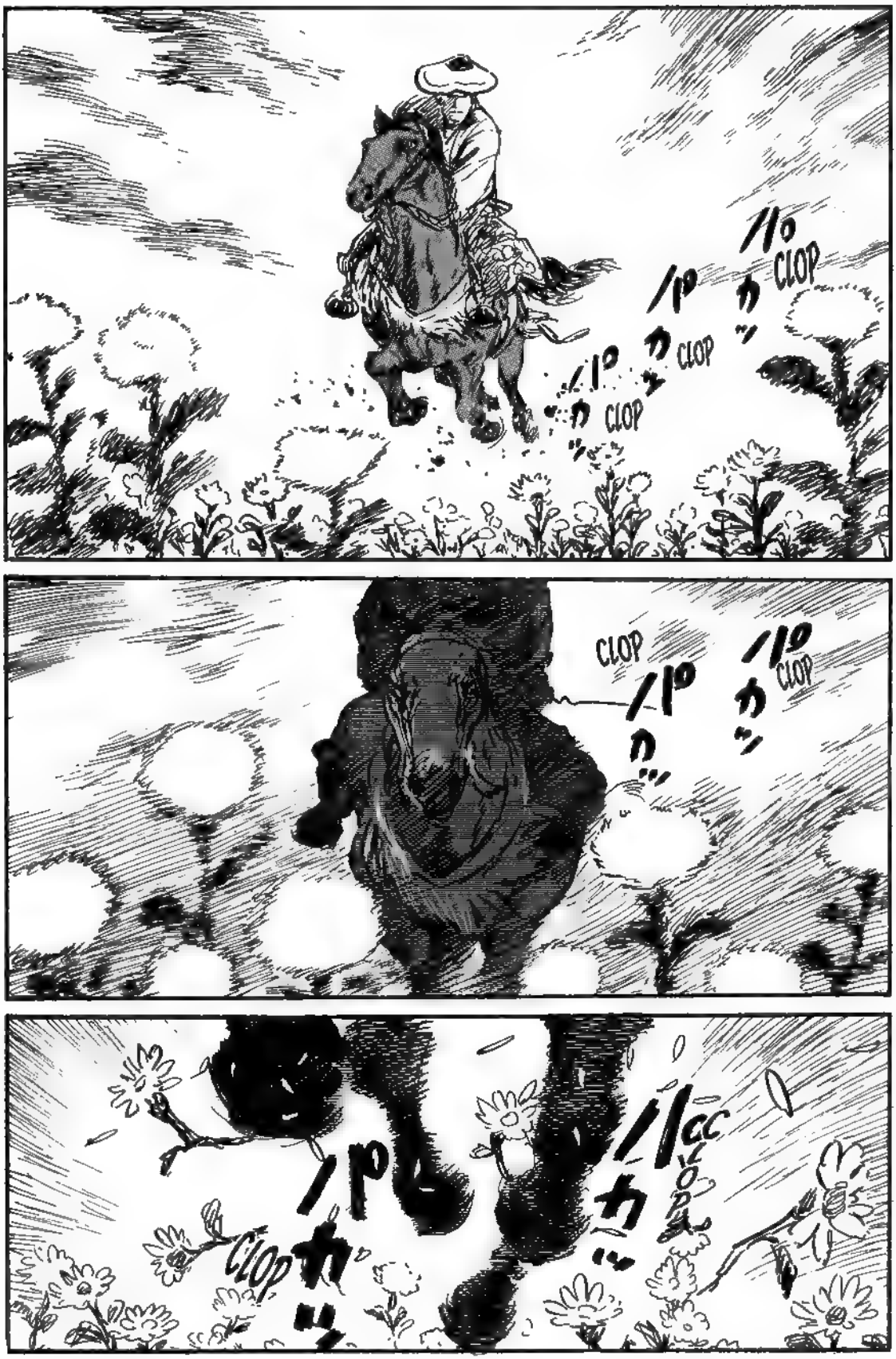

TOMORROW, MT. FUJI WILL BE CRIMSON.
MILORD, HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI HAS COME AGAIN IN HOPE OF SERVING YOU IN THE DARK.
N--NO, SIR.
MASANARI, HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A CRIMSON FUJI?
HANZŌ MASANARI
AGE FIFTEEN.
OVERWHELMED WITH FEELING, HE COULD NOT HOLD BACK HIS TEARS.
AT DAWN, MT. FUJI TURNS RUBY-RED BY SUNLIGHT. IT'S BEAUTIFUL BEYOND WORDS.

# Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

# No. 3: Mizuki






CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP






MASANARI.
YES.
IS THERE A WAY TO LOSE MY SERVANTS?
WOULD YOU LIKE TO?
YUP.


HI-HI-HI-


NIIHIHUB
HUHHIN
HUHHIIIN
HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

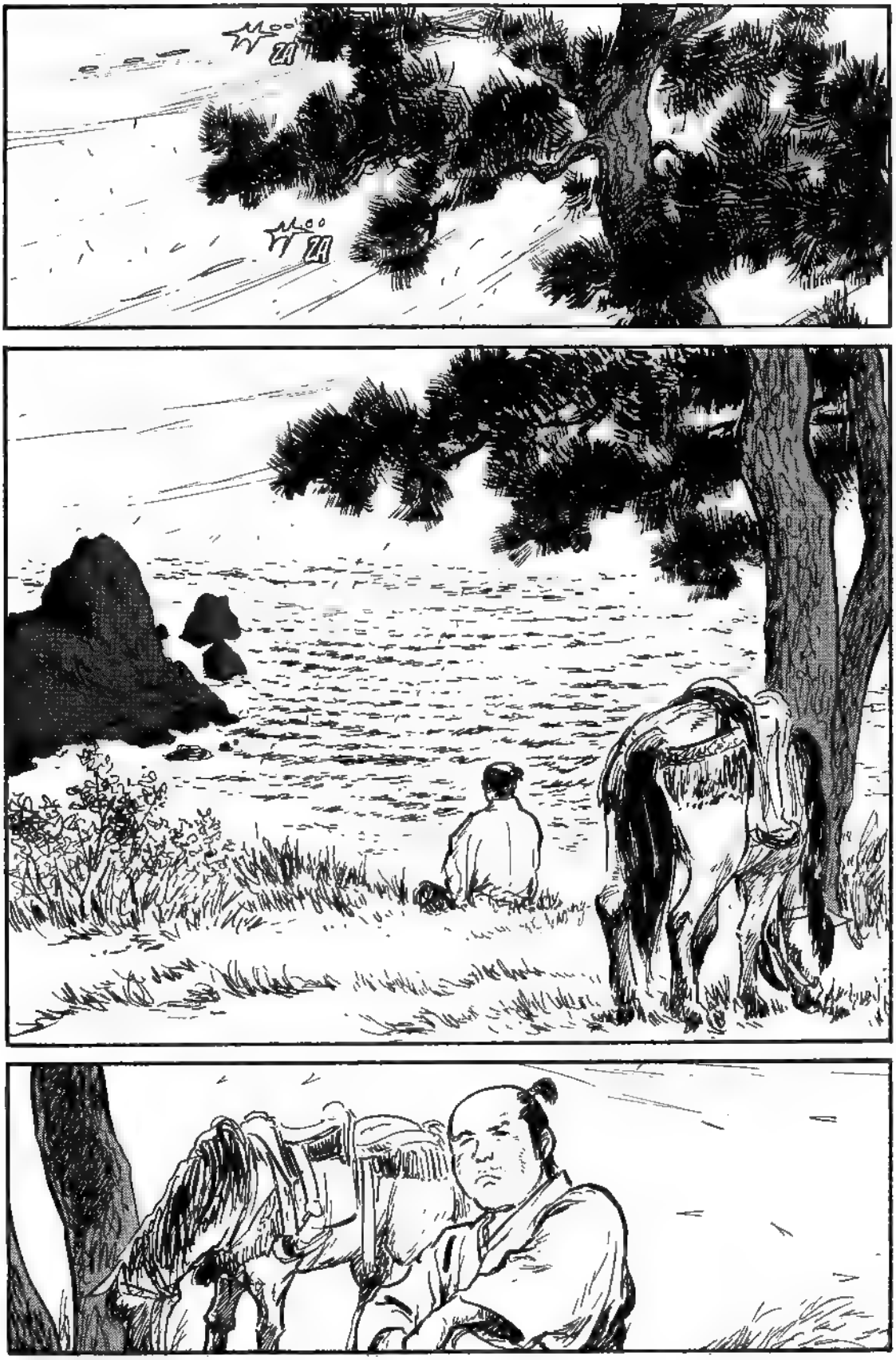

I SHOT SUZUNE BELLS INTO THE HORSES' EARS.
SUZUNE ARE EXTREMELY SMALL, AND SINCE HORSES ARE SENSITIVE TO SOUND, IT'S PERFECT TO DRIVE THEM INSANE.

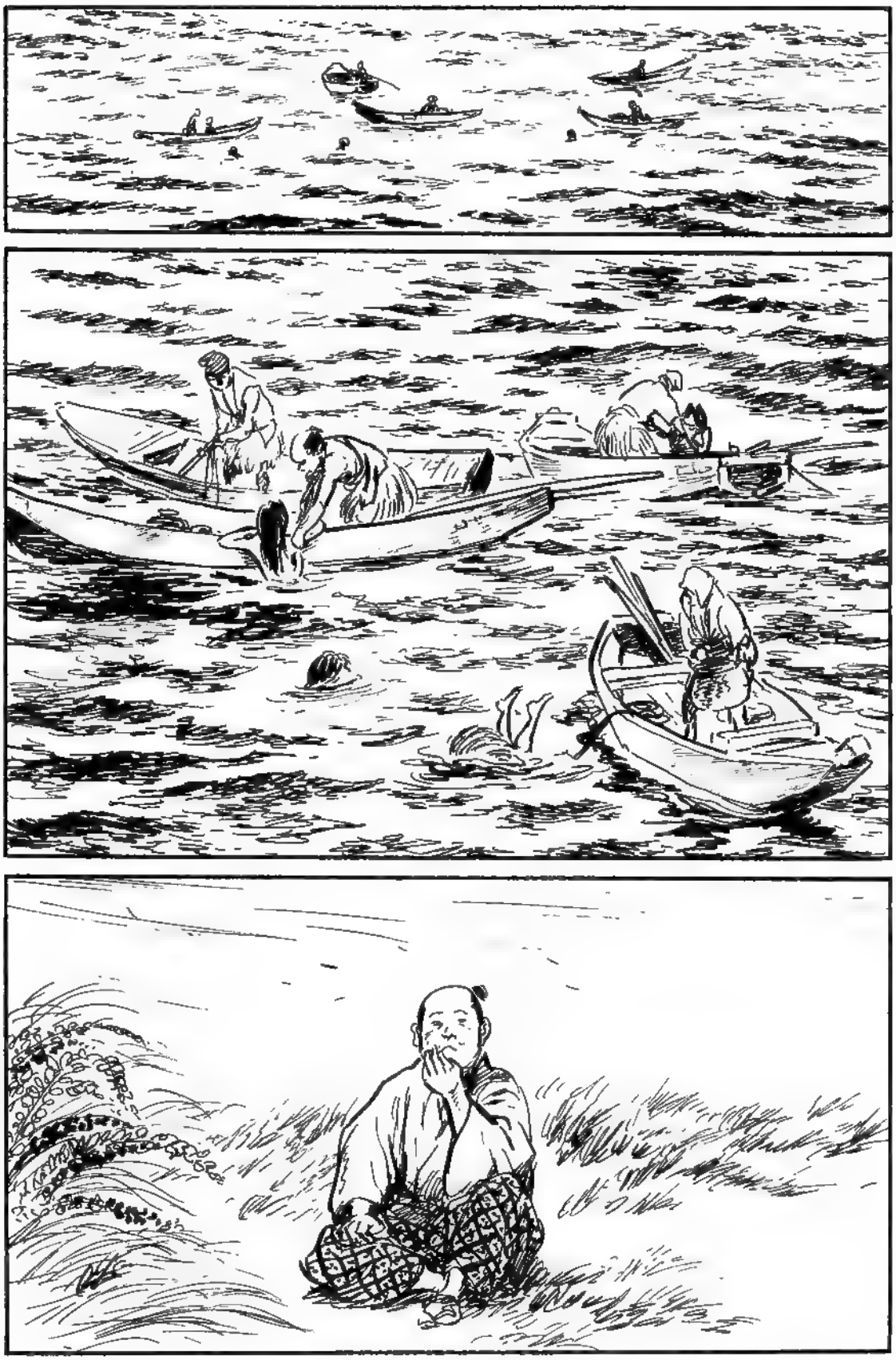

WILL THERE BE ANY EVIDENCE?
THE BELLS WILL FALL OFF WHILE THEY'RE RUNNING AROUND.


HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
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HA

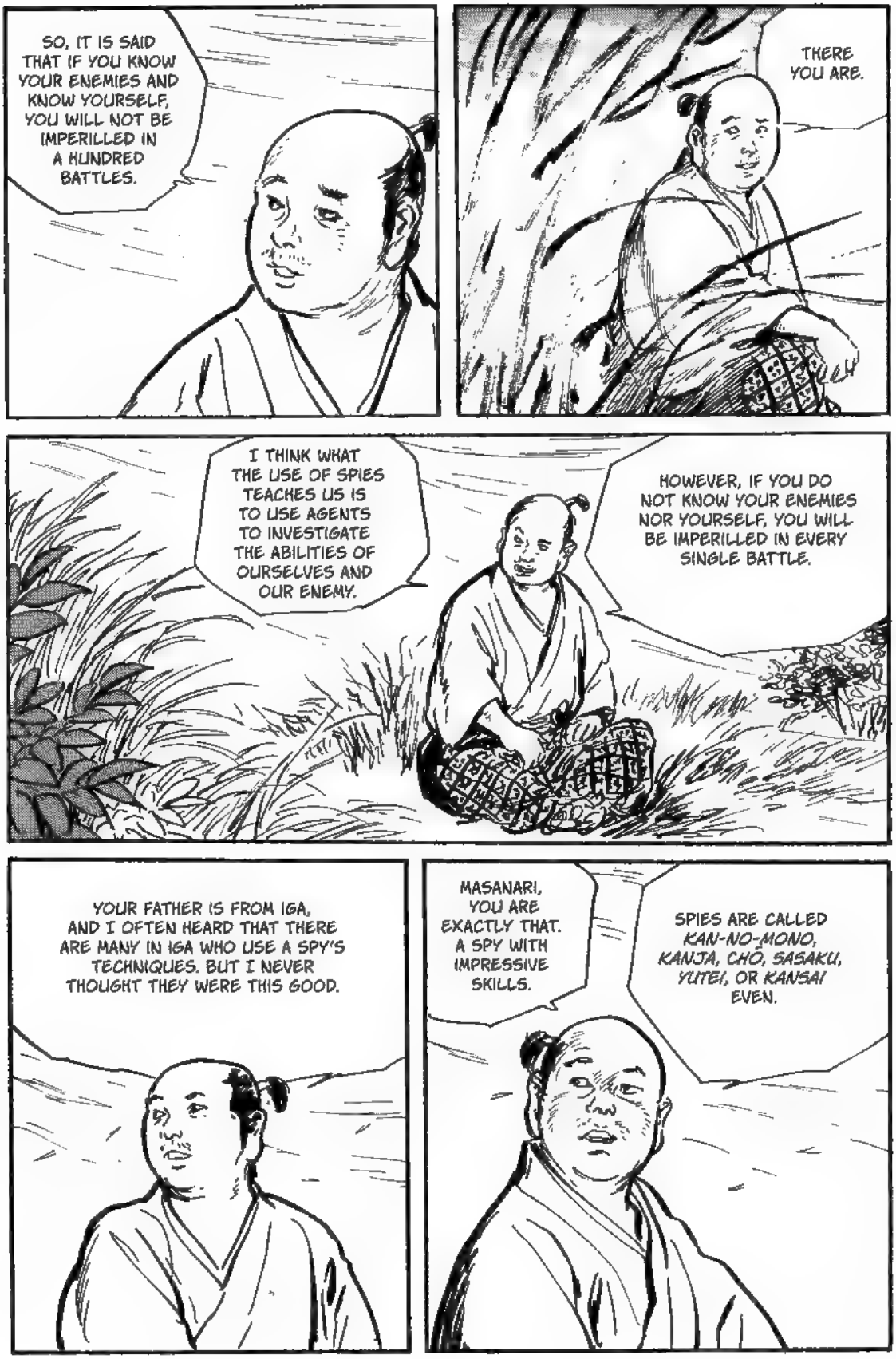

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ZA

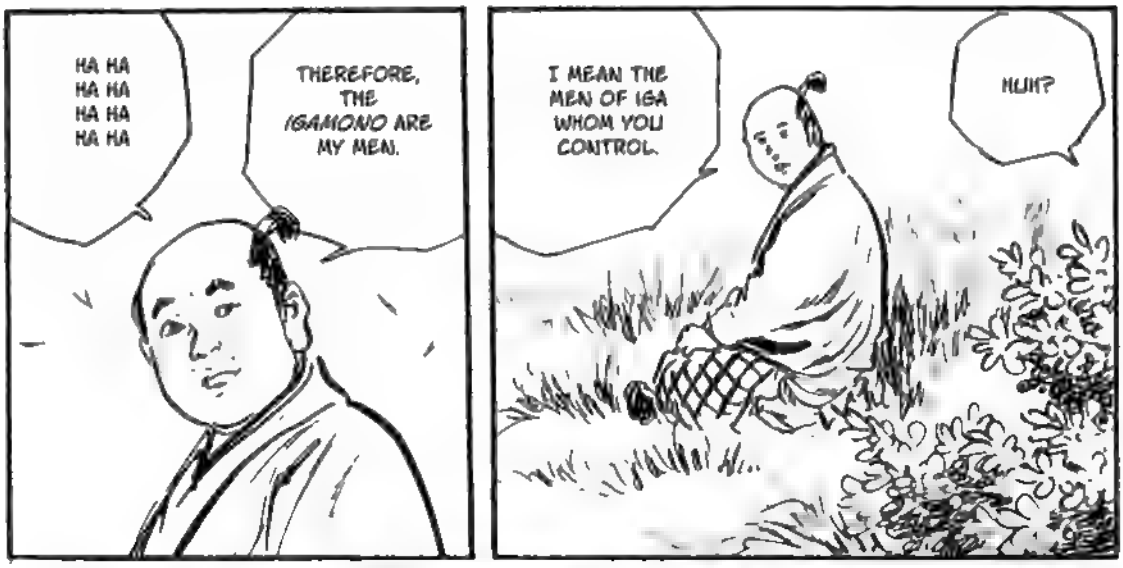



ER... UM... ENERGY, WEAK POINTS AND STRONG... MANEUVERING, VARIATION IN TACTICS... THE ARMY ON THE MARCH, TERRAIN, THE NINE SITUATIONS, ATTACK BY FIRE, AND THE USE OF SPIES.
LAYING PLANS... WAGING WAR... ATTACK BY STRATAGEM... TACTICAL DISPOSITIONS...
"THE ART OF WAR" BY SUN TZU CONSISTS OF THIRTEEN CHAPTERS.
NOW, I THINK AN AGENT OF THE USE OF SPIES IS WHAT YOU ARE.
MASANARI.
YES, SIR.
...IT'S KIND OF HARD TO TALK.
WITHOUT KNOWING WHERE YOU ARE...


SO, IT IS SAID THAT IF YOU KNOW YOUR ENEMIES AND KNOW YOURSELF, YOU WILL NOT BE IMPERILLED IN A HUNDRED BATTLES.
THERE YOU ARE.
I THINK WHAT THE USE OF SPIES TEACHES US IS TO USE AGENTS TO INVESTIGATE THE ABILITIES OF OURSELVES AND OUR ENEMY.
HOWEVER, IF YOU DO NOT KNOW YOUR ENEMIES NOR YOURSELF, YOU WILL BE IMPERILLED IN EVERY SINGLE BATTLE.
YOUR FATHER IS FROM IGA, AND I OFTEN HEARD THAT THERE ARE MANY IN IGA WHO USE A SPY'S TECHNIQUES. BUT I NEVER THOUGHT THEY WERE THIS GOOD.
MASANARI, YOU ARE EXACTLY THAT. A SPY WITH IMPRESSIVE SKILLS.
SPIES ARE CALLED *KAN-NO-MONO, KANJA, CHŌ, SASAKU, YŪTEI,* OR *KANSAI* EVEN.


YES.
MASANARI.
WHEN DID YOU MOVE? NOT EVEN A GRASS RUSTLED.
YES.
I BELIEVE YOU WERE BORN IN OKAZAKI.
ANYWAY. FINE. NOW... ER...
I SEE. YOU WILL HAVE TO TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT SOMETIME.
YES.
AND YET YOU HAVE THE SKILL. WERE YOU TRAINED IN IGA?


ARE THEY ALL FROM IGA?
THE PEOPLE OF ODA CALL THEM *KANZARU*, WHILE THE PEOPLE OF UESUGI CALL THEM *KUSAMONO*.
YES.
I GUESS IN TAKEDA THEY CALL PEOPLE LIKE YOU *SUPPA*.
THERE ARE *RYUHA*. THEY ARE HANDED DOWN FROM OUR ANCESTORS.
HM, WHAT ABOUT *IGAMONO*?
NOW, WHAT TERM SHOULD I USE...?
WELL, I'LL HAVE YOU TELL ME ALL ABOUT THAT, TOO, SOMETIME.

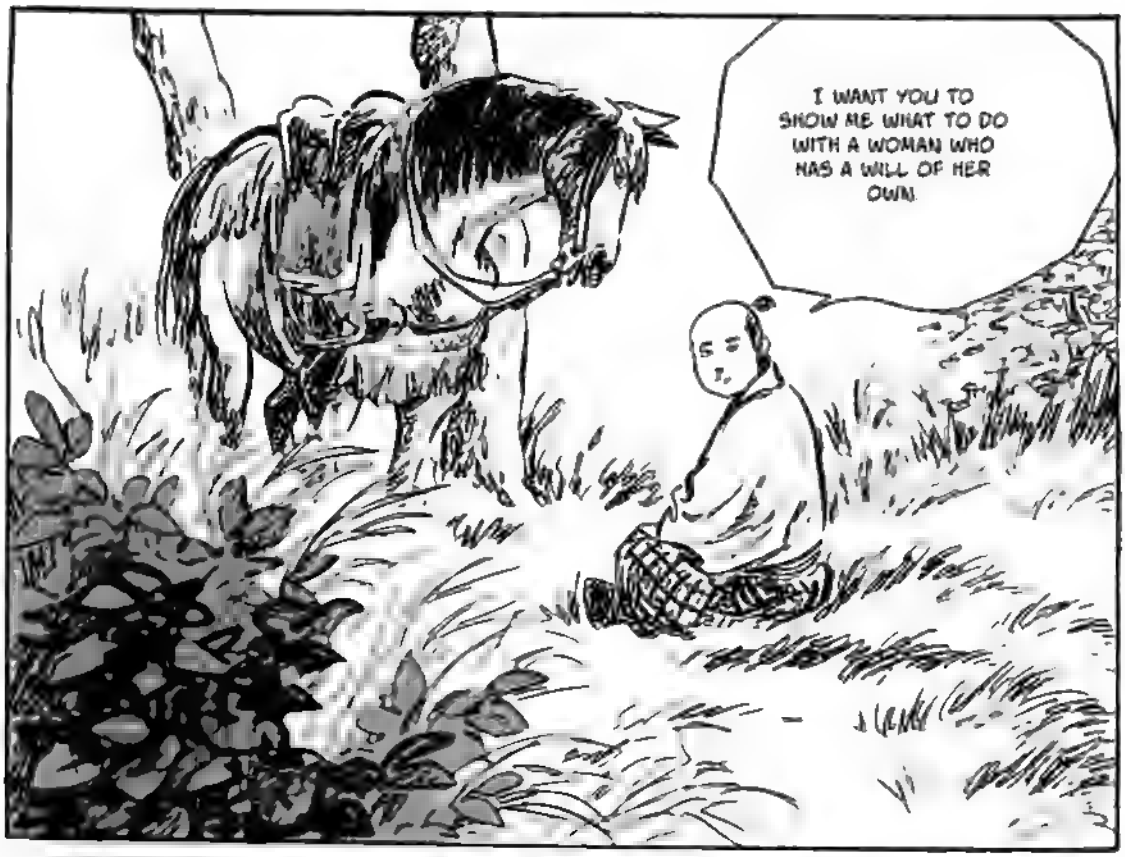

HA HA
HA HA
HA HA
HA HA
THEREFORE, THE *IGAMONO* ARE MY MEN.
I MEAN THE MEN OF IGA WHOM YOU CONTROL.
HUH?


THERE WAS NO DOUBT IN HIS MIND THAT MOTONOBU WAS HIS MASTER-- BUT MOTONOBU WAS A PRISONER OF IMAGAWA
DUMBFOUNDED, HANZŌ WAS AT A LOSS FOR WORDS.


NOT ONLY THAT, USING HIS MASTER AS THEIR SHACKLES, IMAGAWA USED MIKAWA WARRIORS AS FRONTLINE MEAT IN EVERY BATTLE THEY FOUGHT
BY TAKING HIS MASTER AS HOSTAGE, IMAGAWA YOSHIMOTO OF SUNPU SECURED MIKAWA OKAZAKI.

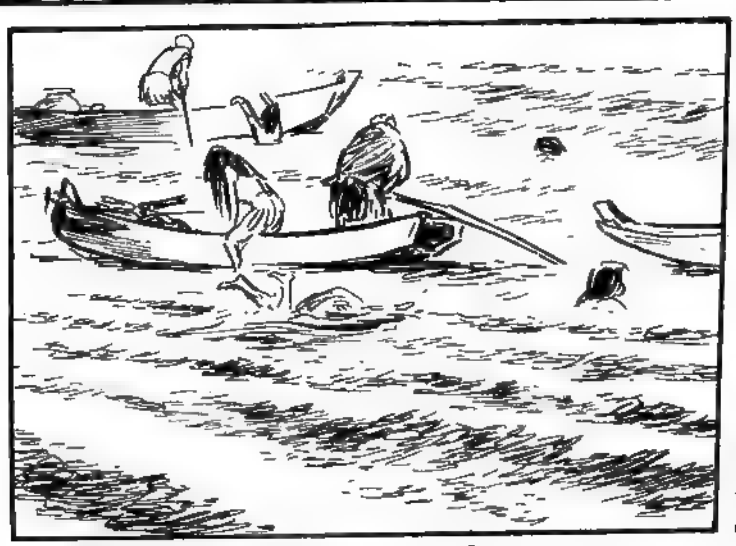

HE CAN'T EVEN GO BACK TO HIS OWN TERRITORY, AND YET HE TALKS AS IF HE RULES IGA.
HOW CAN MY LORD BE SO RELAXED UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES ?!
WHAT IS HE THINKING? CALLING US *IGAMONO* AND ALL.
...
...
BY THE WAY, MASANARI.
I HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO HANDLE THEM.
I DON'T KNOW WOMEN.


I MUST TAKE SEKIGUCHI YOSHIKIRO'S DAUGHTER AS MY WIFE IN TWO DAYS. BUT WITHOUT KNOWING, I CAN'T WIN
SUN TZU'S ART OF WAR SAYS SO.
...WHAT MEN AND WOMEN DO.
USING YOUR SPY'S TECHNIQUE, SHOW ME...
HELP ME.
SO.
NO WHORES, THOUGH. I HEAR THEY'LL LET YOU DO ANYTHING IF YOU PAY THEM. THAT MEANS THEY'RE NO ENEMY.


I WANT YOU TO SHOW ME WHAT TO DO WITH A WOMAN WHO HAS A WILL OF HER OWN.









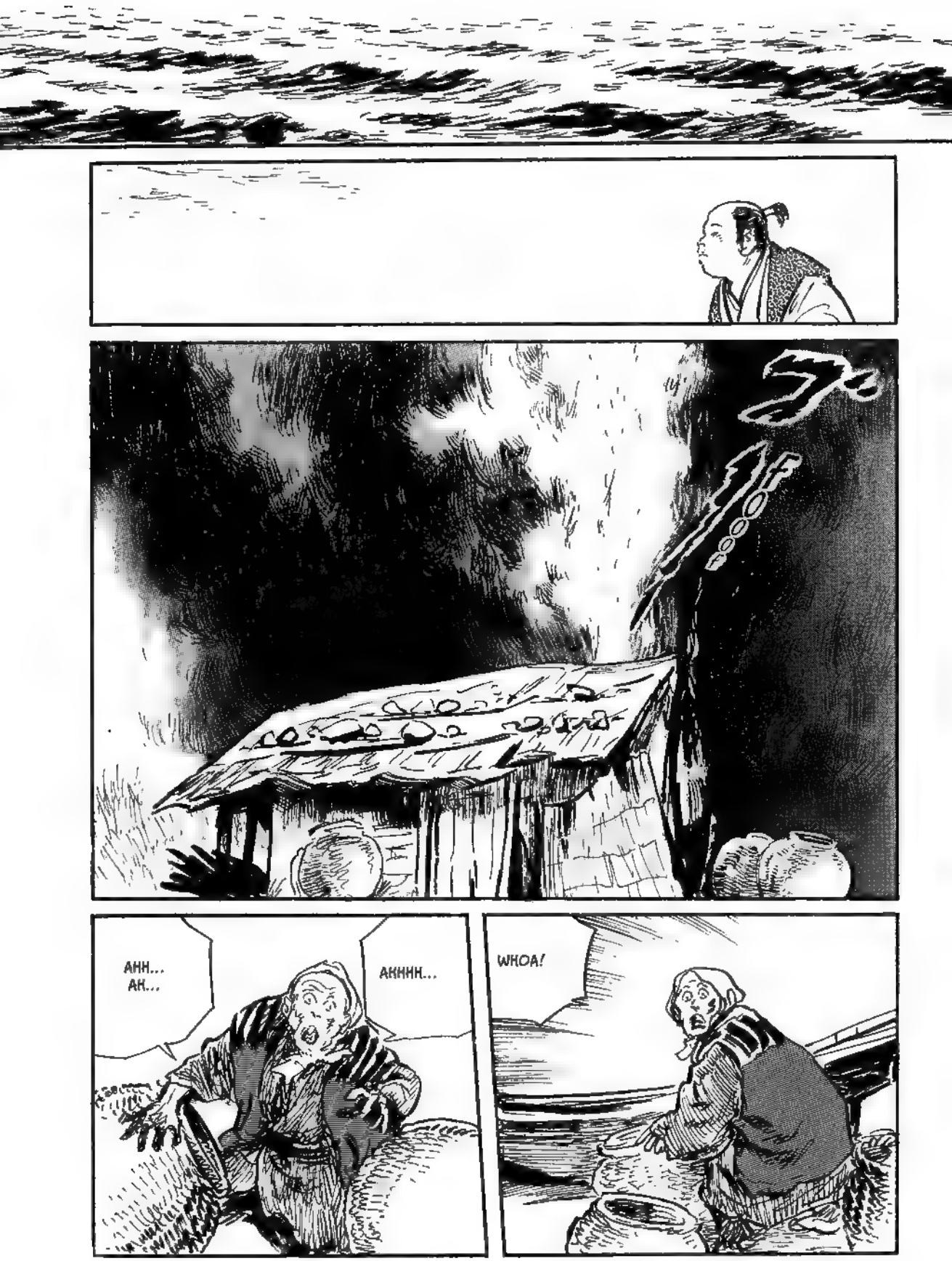



ふわあ
fuwaa

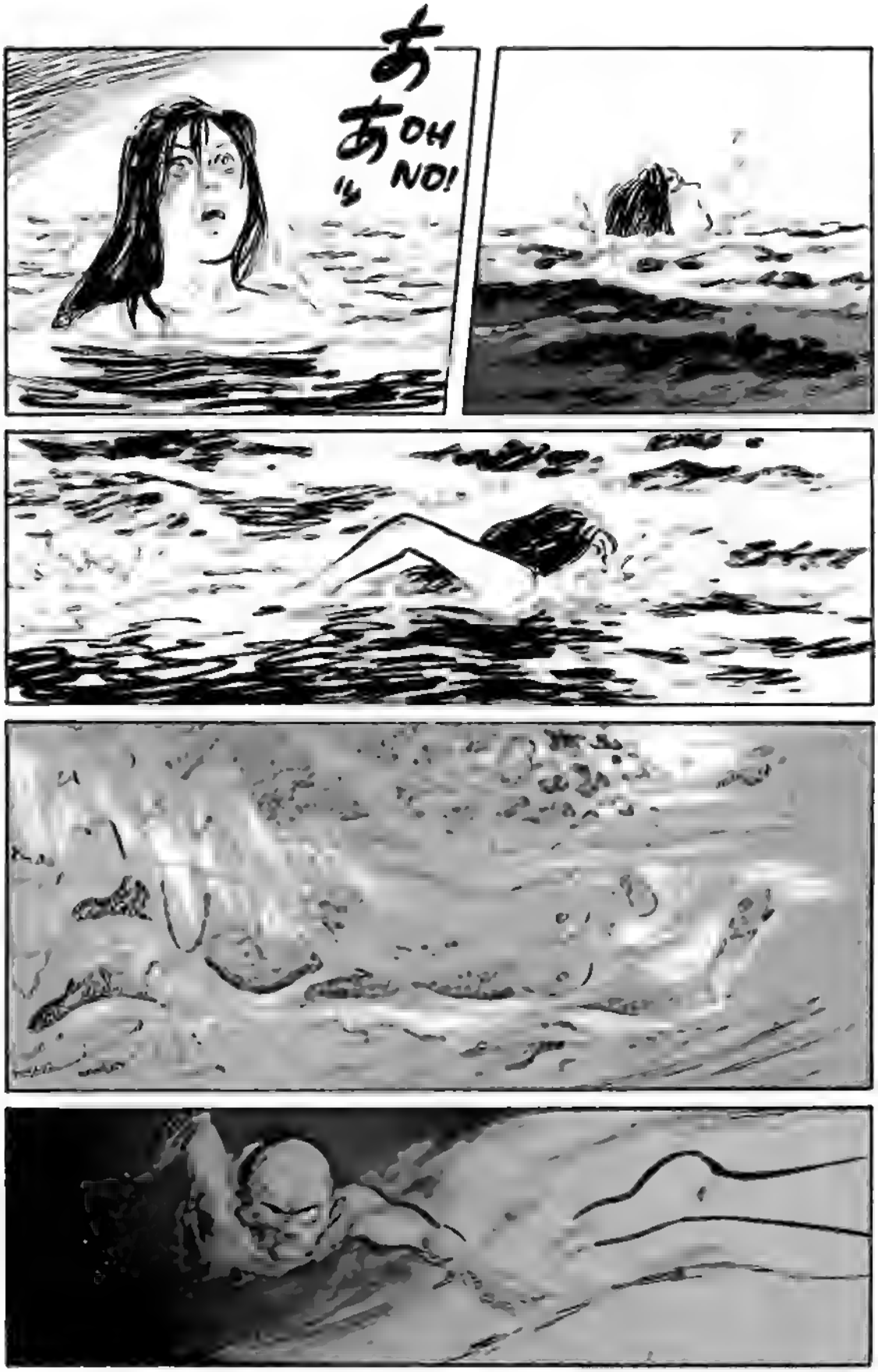



YEAH.
ER...
PLEASE WATCH, MILORD.
IS HE REALLY GOING TO SHOW ME HOW IT IS BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN?
HMPH.
WHATEVER I ASK OF HIM, HE DOES WELL EVEN THOUGH HE'S YOUNGER THAN I AM.
GEEZ.
MY HEART'S GOING CRAZY.
IS HE ALREADY FAMILIAR WITH...?



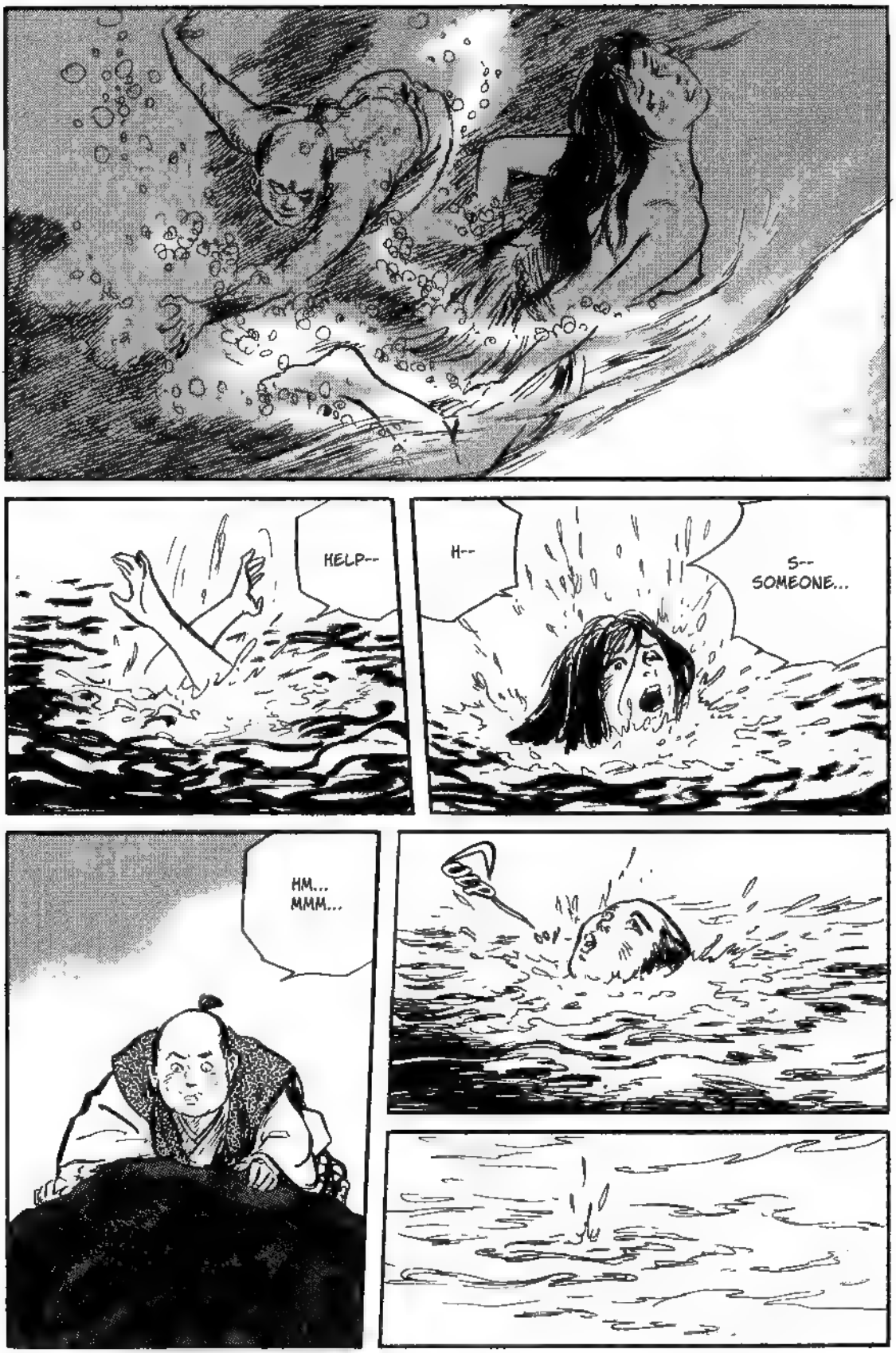

AHH...
AH...
AHHHH...
WHOA!


THE NETS!
THE NETS!
OH NO!
FIRE!!
THE
NETS!
TAKE OUT
THE NETS!


あ
あ OH
NO!


HM?!




HELP--
H--
S--
SOMEONE...
HM...
MMM...






AAAHH.
S-SOMEONE!
AH.
OHH.




HANZÓ'S WHOLE BODY WAS ENGULFED N A BLAZE CALLED INSTINCT
... WHERE THE ENTRANCE TO HER WAS.
IT ACCURATELY TOLD THE HARDENED PART OF HIS BODY
CAN
HANZÓ PUSHED THE RAGING PART OF HIS BODY INTO IT...


BUT ONCE WASN'T ENOUGH WHEN IT HAPPENED THE SECOND TIME, THE WOMAN'S GROAN HIT HANZŌ'S EAR
IT DID NOT CONVEY HER SUFFERING. IT HAD A CRUDE EARTHINESS ABOUT IT WHICH NUMBED HIS HEAD


EVEN KNOWING HE'D ORDERED IT, HE DETESTED HIS SERVANT NONETHELESS
AND WAS ABHORRED
THE FORGOTTEN MASTER WATCHED THE WHOLE AFFAIR
HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI, AGE FIFTEEN.
MATSUDAIRA JIRŌ SABURŌ MOTONOBU TO BE KNOWN AS IEYASU, AGE SIXTEEN.
THE MASTER AND THE SERVANT, BOTH BARELY HAVING COME OF AGE.


ゆか
ゆかゆか


あ
あ
KON


SHK
SHK
SHK


DO NOT
MOVE AN INCH.
REMAIN AS
YOU ARE.


IF YOU SEPARATE, I'LL STRIKE.
KACHAK
あああああ
IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE ANSWERING...
ANSWER MY QUESTION HONESTLY.
Y--YES, SIR...
...HEH HEH HEH, I'LL CUT OFF WHAT CONNECTS YOU TWO.


WE'RE NOT INTERESTED IN WHAT YOU DO AS A MAN AND A WOMAN.
THERE'S NO NEED TO BE EMBARRASSED.
DON'T HIDE YOUR FACE. KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN.
AHH


THE NETS' STOREHOUSE IS BURNING. THE ENTIRE VILLAGE IS OUT, TRYING TO STOP IT AND YET, YOU TWO ARE HUMPING CLOSE BY. THAT DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT.
WE CAME BECAUSE OF THE FIRE.
IT AROUSED SUSPICION, THAT'S ALL.
S--SO THAT... I COULD... COERCE HER TO BE MINE.
WHAT?!
I-- I LIT THE FIRE ON THE STOREHOUSE.
SO WHAT'S THE STORY?
I WOULDN'T ATTRACT THEIR ATTENTION... EVEN IF SHE SCREAMED, NO ONE WOULD NOTICE... THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.
ONCE I STARTED IT... I KNEW THE ENTIRE VILLAGE WOULD RUSH OVER.


HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA.
HEH HEH
HEH HEH HEH
HEH HEH HEH
HEH.
I...
I AM...
I AM VERY
SORRY.
MATSUZŌ...
I'M
MATSUZŌ.
YOUR
NAME?
THE WIT OF A PIG
AND A PEASANT'S
RECKLESSNESS.
HEE HEE HEE.
IT WORKED
SPLENDIDLY,
I SEE.


BUT SHE NEVER TOOK NOTICE OF ME... AND I... I COULD NOT HELP...
AND... I'VE FALLEN FOR THIS WOMAN... I TRIED TO SEDUCE HER...
N--NO. I'M FROM HIKUMA... I COME HERE... EVERY NOW AND THEN... TO PURCHASE SEAWEED WRAPPERS...
DO YOU LIVE HERE?
Y--YES... CHIKUWA... KAMABOKO, SEAWEED WRAPPER, SEA BREAMS... AND SALT, PAPER, COTTON... MADDER... SESAME OIL OF EGO... AND TEA.
TELL ME THE PRODUCTS SPECIALLY HANDLED BY THE WHOLESALERS OF TRAVELING MERCHANTS IN YOSHIWARAMINATO, OOKAMINATO, AND KAMIYAMA.
HMPH... A MERCHANT, HUH?
Y-- YES.

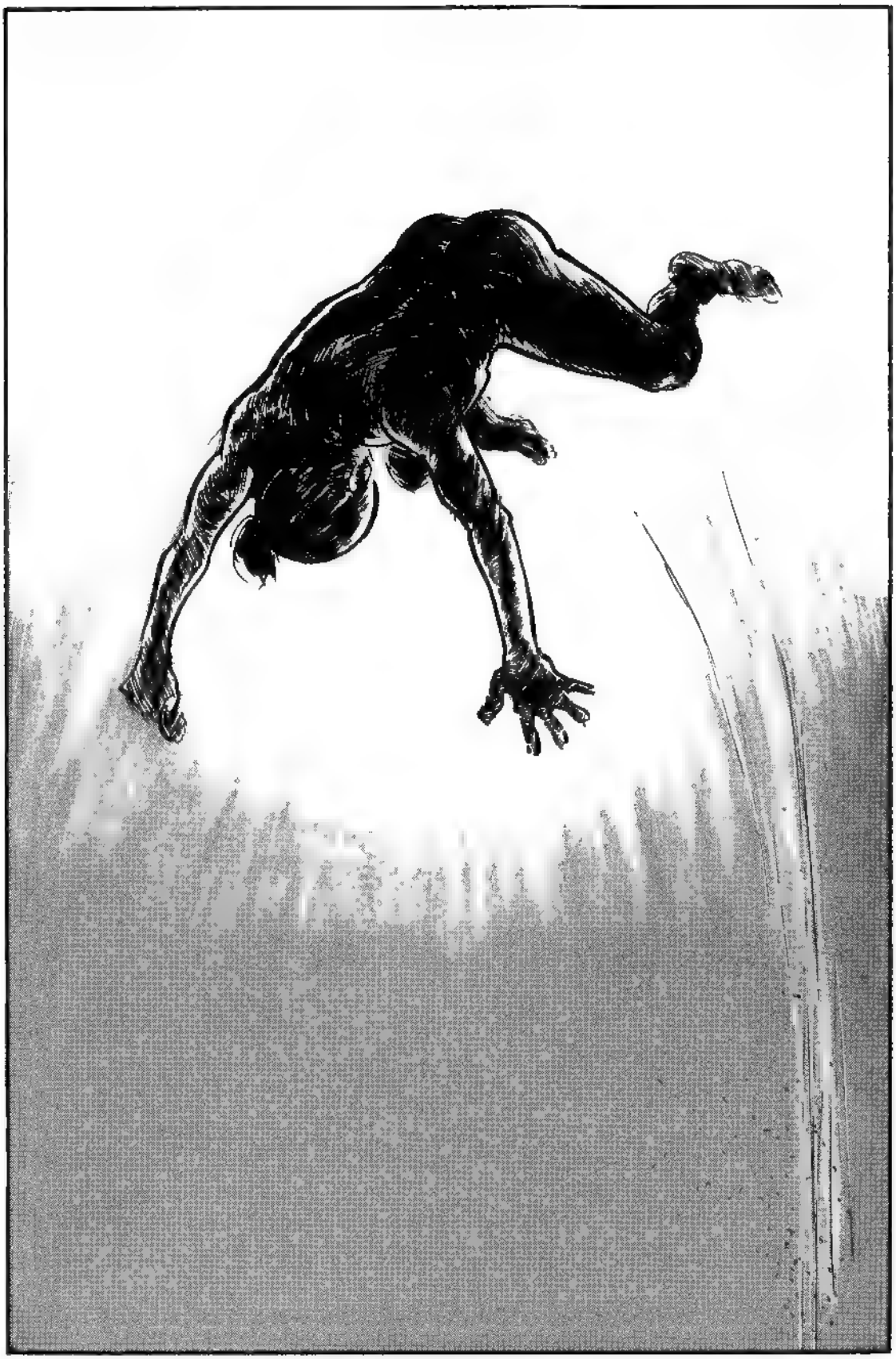

SHINNG
WHO ARE THE BIGGEST MERCHANTS IN SUNPU?
TOMONO-SAMA AND MATSUKI-SAMA.
I... I MEANT TO... MAKE UP FOR IT AFTERWARD...
IT IS UNPARDONABLE TO START A FIRE JUST TO GAIN A WOMAN.


THERE'S NO NEED FOR THAT.
I WILL COME AND APOLOGIZE PROPERLY... WILL YOU TELL ME... YOUR NAME, SIR ..?
Y-- YES, SIR...
BUT LET ME REPEAT, ARSON IS NO GOOD.
WE WON'T BE UNREASONABLE. WE HEARD HER CRY IN ECSTASY AFTER ALL.
WHEW


A PERFECT NAME FOR HER, I SAY HEH HEH HEH
HMPH. LIKE THE AKUYA SHELLFISH, HUH?
A AKUYA
WHAT'S HER NAME?


HM?!

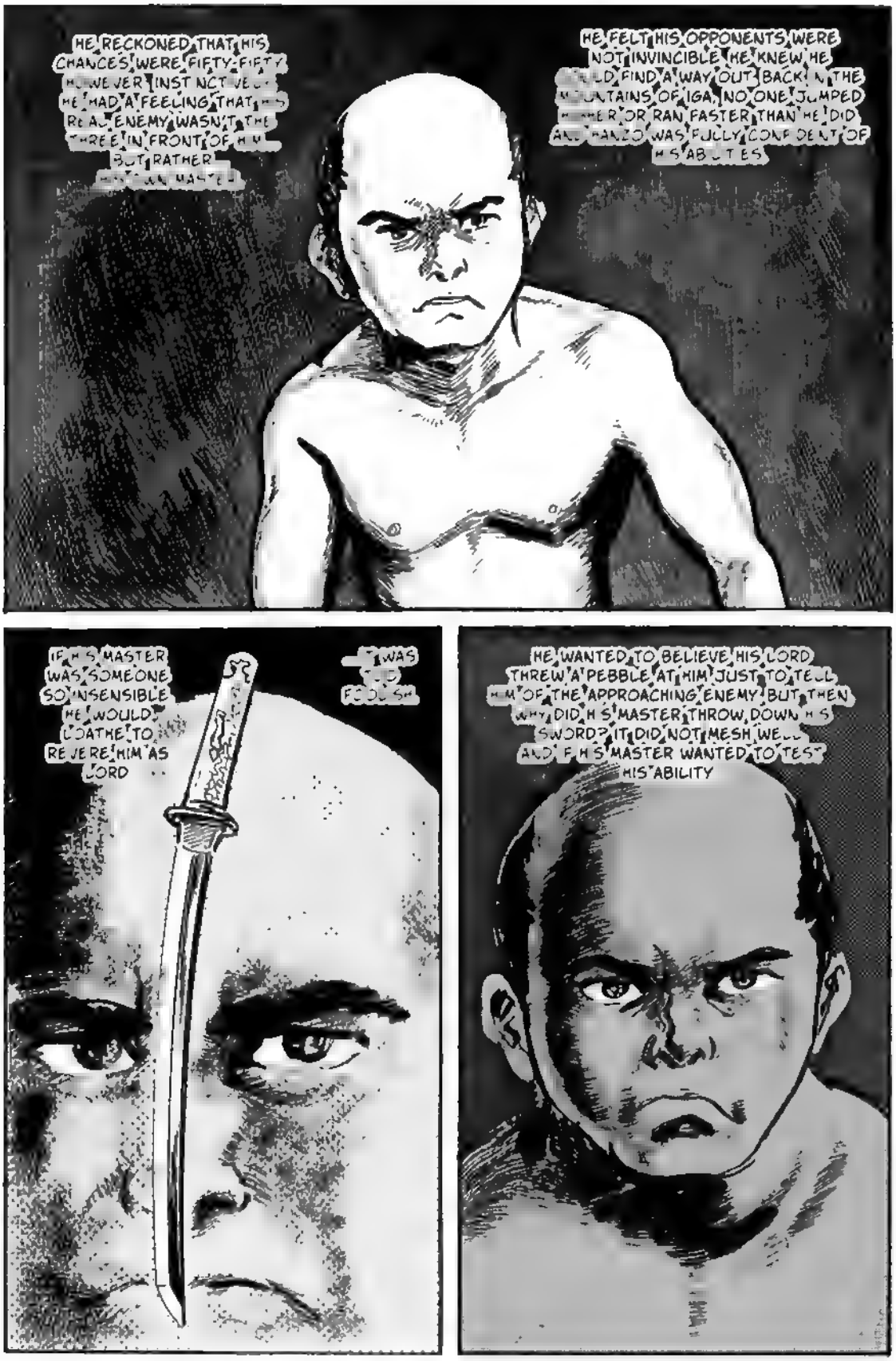

YOU HAD AN UNSHEATHED SWORD HIDDEN THERE!
BASTARD!
ARE YOU A *KANZARU* OF ODA OR A *SUPPA* OF TAKEDA?

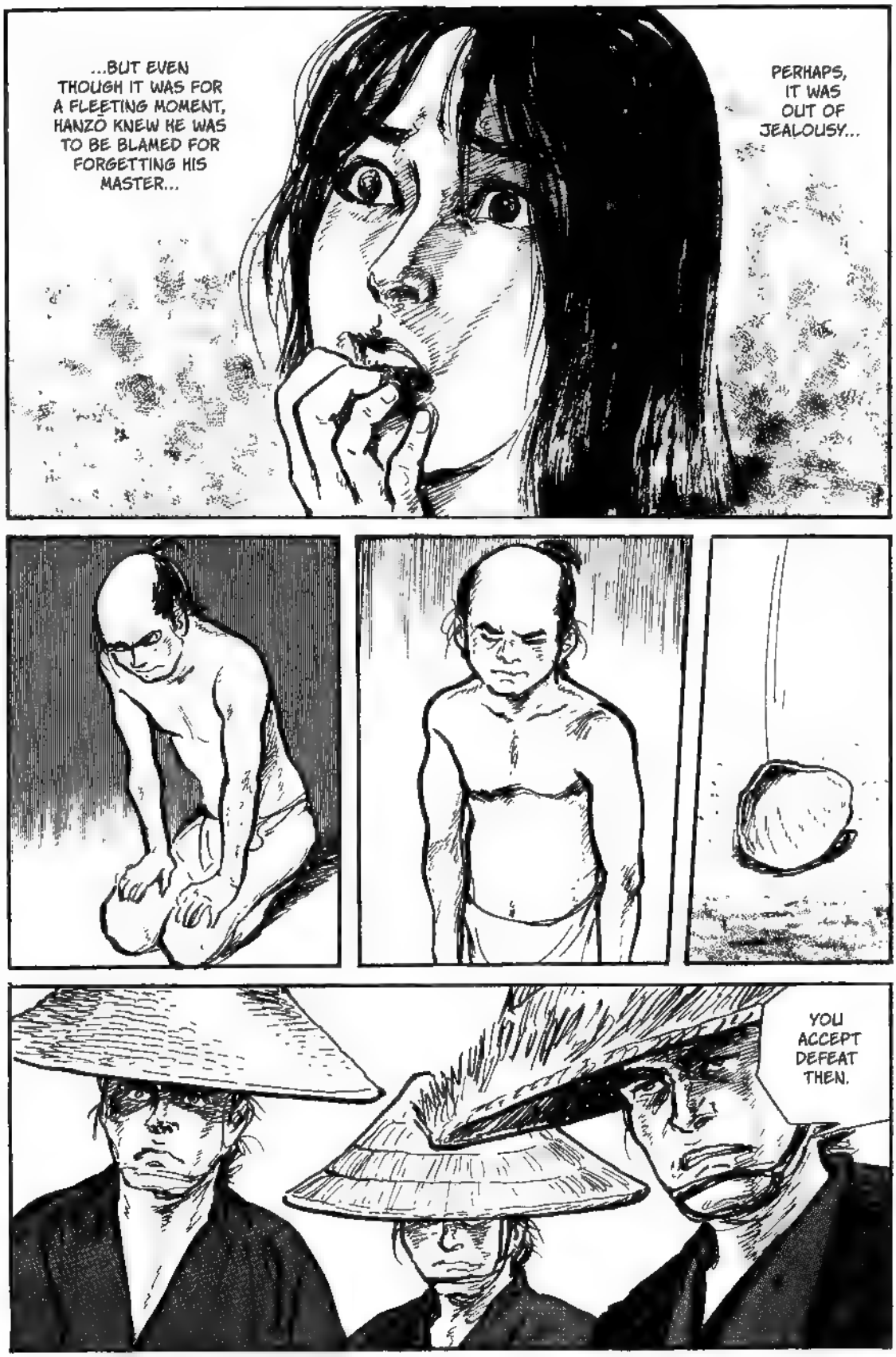


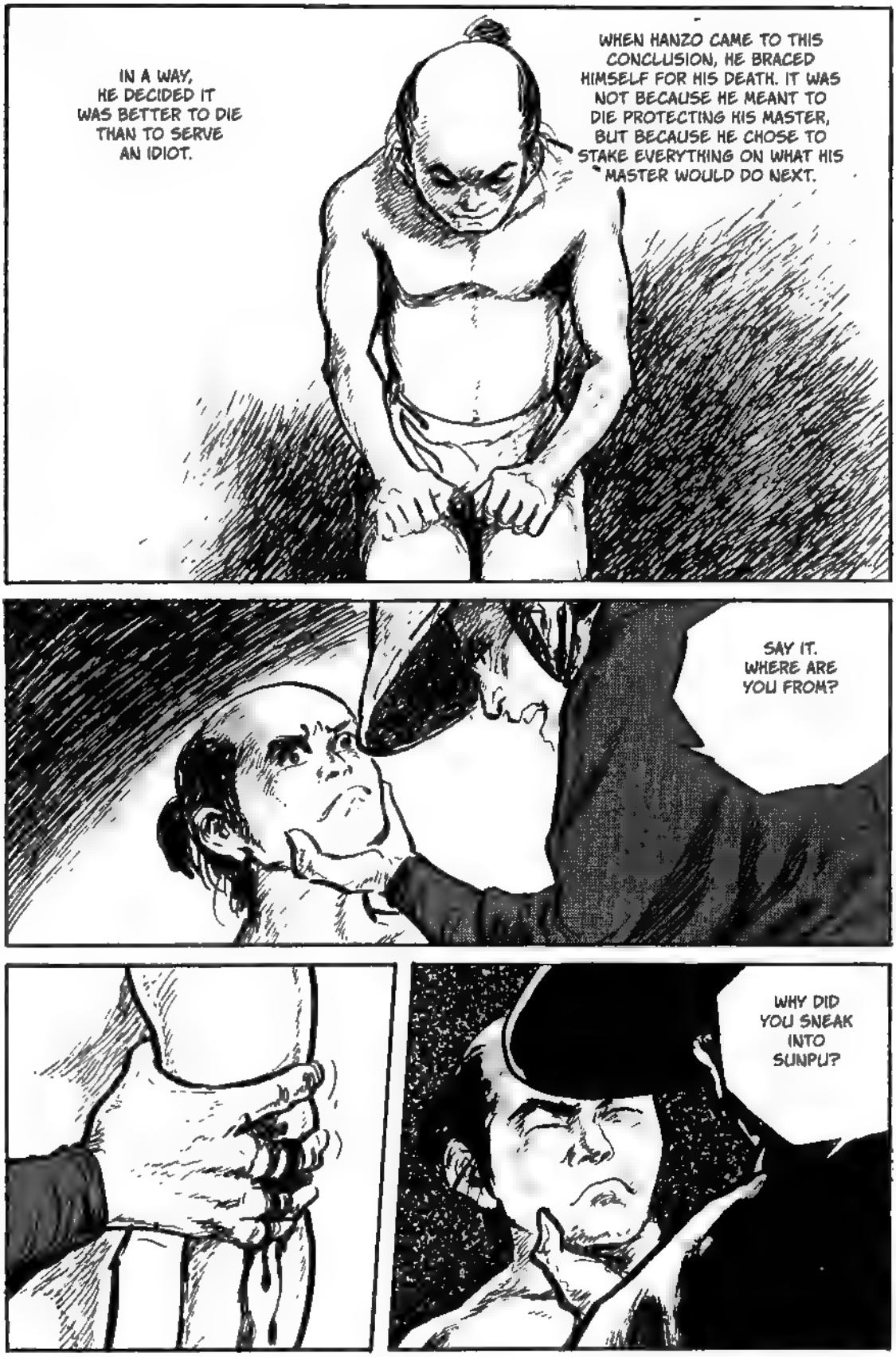



HOW ARE YOU GOING TO FIGHT US WITH NO WEAPON?
IT'S USELESS!
FROM THE WAY YOU MOVED, I'M SURE YOU'RE A *SUPPA* OF SOME KIND. YOU MUST KNOW WHAT WE'RE CAPABLE OF.
WHAT'RE YOU UP TO?
JARI
WHY ARE YOU HERE?


IF YOU TALK, WE MAY SPARE YOUR LIFE.
WHO SENT YOU?
IF YOU'RE A HIRED HAND, WE'LL PAY YOU DOUBLE.


HE RECKONED THAT HIS CHANCES WERE FIFTY-FIFTY
HOWEVER INSTINCTIVELY HE HAD A FEELING THAT HIS REAL ENEMY WASN'T THE THREE IN FRONT OF HIM BUT RATHER
HE FELT HIS OPPONENTS WERE NOT INVINCIBLE HE KNEW HE COULD FIND A WAY OUT BACK IN THE MOUNTAINS OF IGA. NO ONE JUMPED HIGHER OR RAN FASTER THAN HE DID AND HANZO WAS FULLY CONFIDENT OF HIS ABILITIES
IF HIS MASTER WAS SOMEONE SO INSENSIBLE HE WOULD LOATHE TO REVERE HIM AS LORD ..
FOOLISH
HE WANTED TO BELIEVE HIS LORD THREW A PEBBLE AT HIM JUST TO TELL HIM OF THE APPROACHING ENEMY BUT THEN WHY DID HIS MASTER THROW DOWN HIS SWORD? IT DID NOT MESH WELL AND IF HIS MASTER WANTED TO TEST HIS ABILITY


...BUT EVEN THOUGH IT WAS FOR A FLEETING MOMENT, HANZO KNEW HE WAS TO BE BLAMED FOR FORGETTING HIS MASTER...
PERHAPS, IT WAS OUT OF JEALOUSY...
YOU ACCEPT DEFEAT THEN.


IN A WAY, HE DECIDED IT WAS BETTER TO DIE THAN TO SERVE AN IDIOT.
WHEN HANZO CAME TO THIS CONCLUSION, HE BRACED HIMSELF FOR HIS DEATH. IT WAS NOT BECAUSE HE MEANT TO DIE PROTECTING HIS MASTER, BUT BECAUSE HE CHOSE TO STAKE EVERYTHING ON WHAT HIS MASTER WOULD DO NEXT.
SAY IT. WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
WHY DID YOU SNEAK INTO SUNPU?


SCREAM IT! OTHERWISE, KAKUTE'S HORN WILL REACH YOUR BONES
URK...
HOLD IT


OH, MOTONOBU-SAMA.
I AM UNKI, A PATROLLING NOKIZARU.
WHO ARE YOU?


I'M DAKKI.
AND I'M SAKKI.
WHUMP
ドシャ
THAT'S MY SWORD.




AND HE IS MY SHADOW ATTENDANT...


あ
! OH!


HANZŌ OF IGA, SENT FROM OKAZAKI TO SERVE ME IN THE DARK.


OH WELL.
MOTONOBU-SAMA, THAT WON'T DO.
HE IS ONE OF HIS SONS.
SO HE'S OF JŌKANNYŪDŌ-DONO OF IGA...
MY SWORD PLEASE.
SURE.
YOU MUST ACCOMPANY US WITH YOUR ATTENDANT TO THE PUBLIC OFFICE AND GIVE SOME EXPLANATION.


WSSH
BLORTCH

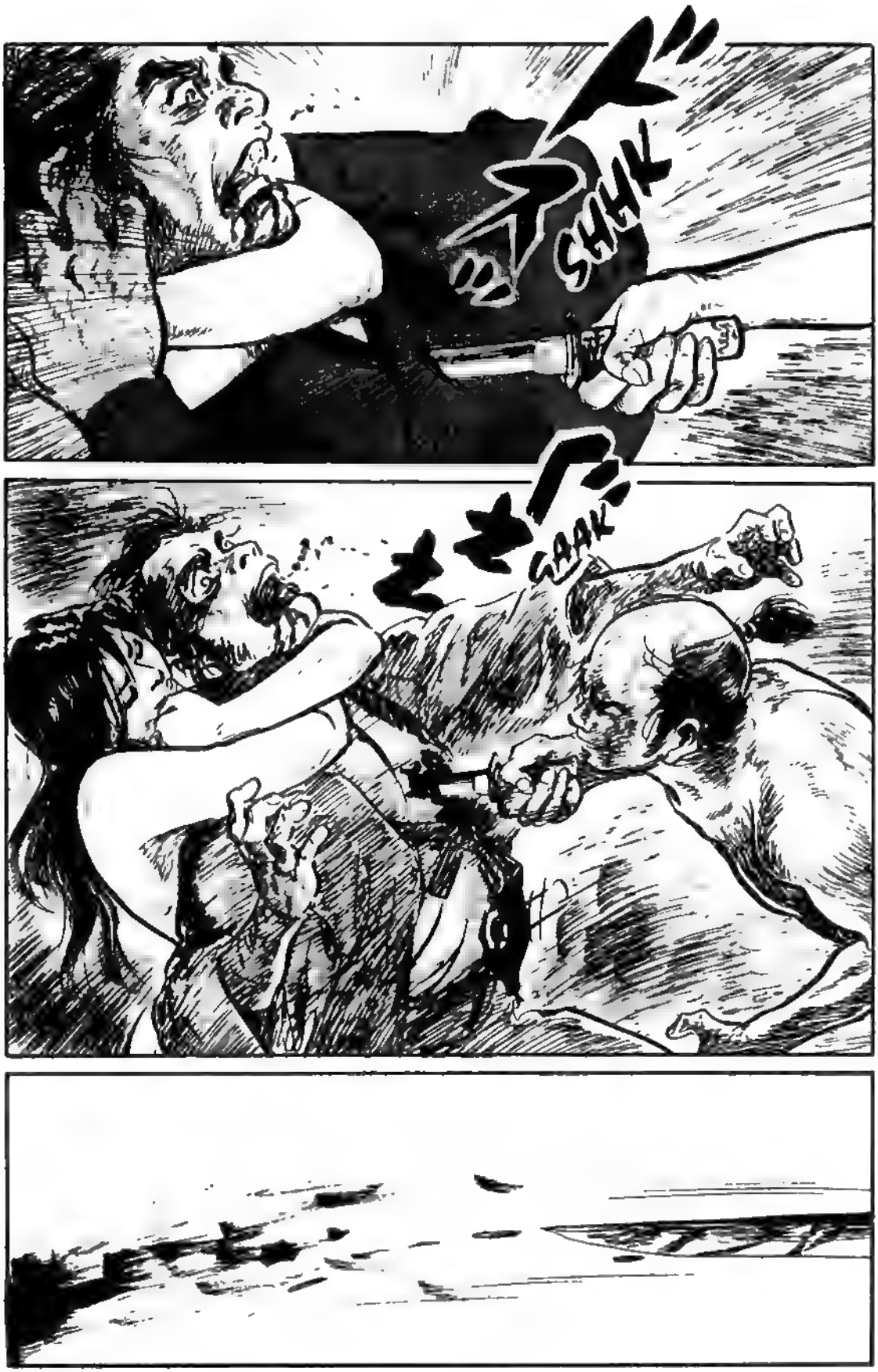

SHHI
MGH.
YOU BASTARD !
OOH.
GLUK


ドサ
THUMP
THE WORD NINGEN CONSISTS OF KANJI THAT MEAN "MAN" AND "AMONG OR BETWEEN." I WONDER WHY.
SHHHP
TO BE AMONG PEOPLE IS QUITE HARD. BETWEEN MASTER AND SERVANT. BETWEEN ALLY AND ENEMY. BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN.
IS THAT BECAUSE WE MUST LIVE AMONG MEN?


A TRIFLE COULD EASILY DAMAGE A RELATIONSHIP AND CAUSE A FIGHT. INDEED, IT'S DIFFICULT. IT TRULY IS. ARE WE CALLED *NINGEN* BECAUSE WE LIVE IN THE MIDST OF SUCH RELATIONSHIPS?



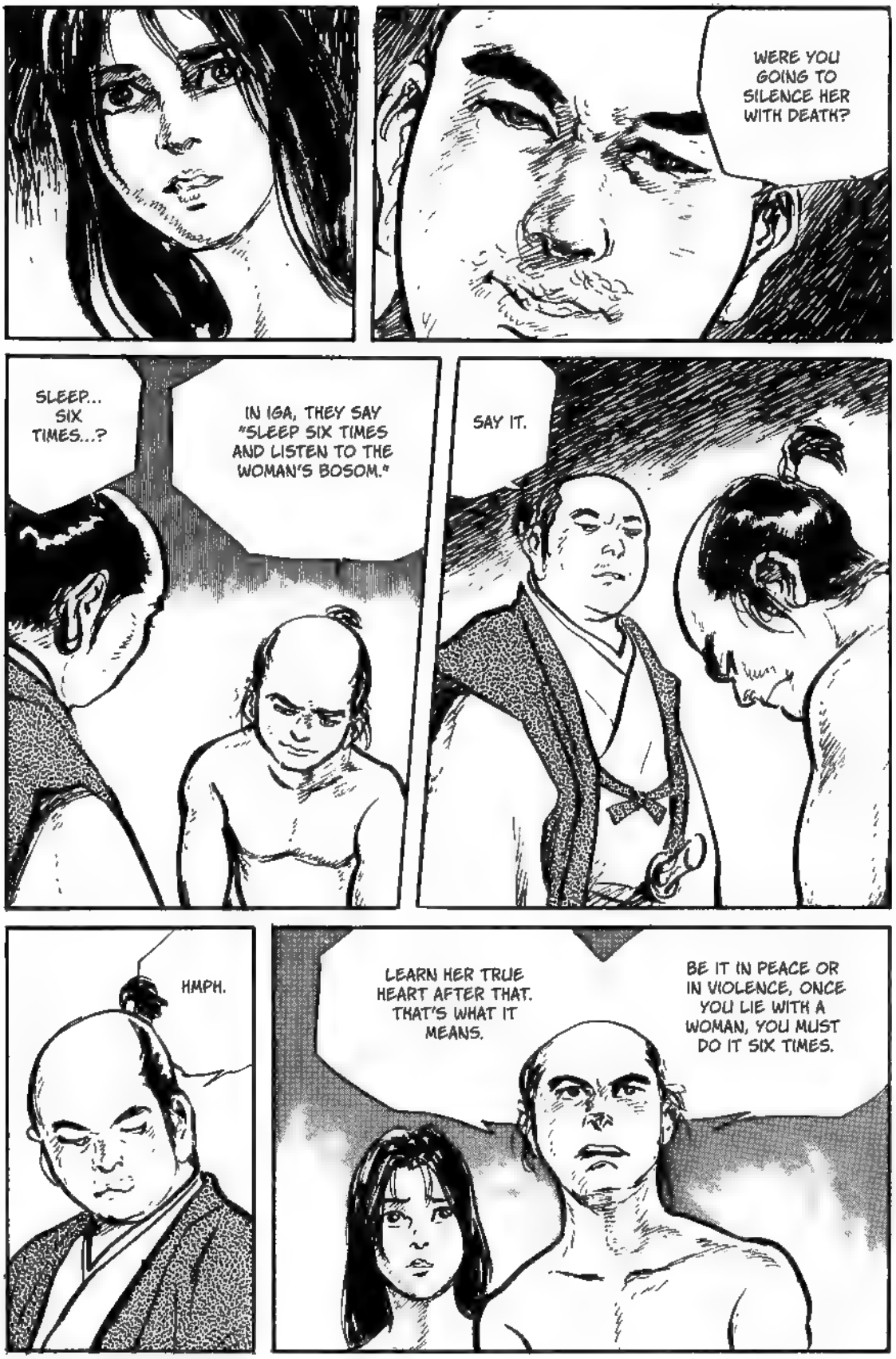

NOOOOO!


SHHK
GAAK


I RAPED YOU. YOU MUST LOATHE ME.
WHY...?!


THAT'S WHY I WON'T LEAVE YOU THE REST OF MY LIFE.
YOU VIOLATED ME, AND I CAN NO LONGER BE WITH ANY OTHER MAN. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I HAVE NOW.
QUITE MAGNANIMOUS. JUST AS WHAT YOU EXPECT FROM *MIZUKI*, A WOMAN OF THE SEA.
A VERY CLEAR ANSWER. HA HA HA HA HA.


HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA.
MATCHING YIN-YANG MAKES A GOOD COUPLE.
HANZŌ, SHE'S A YANG OF A WOMAN, PERFECT FOR A YIN LIKE YOU.
NOW, HANZŌ.
IF THE *NOKIZARU* TRIO DIDN'T GET IN THE WAY, WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE TO THE *MIZUKI*?

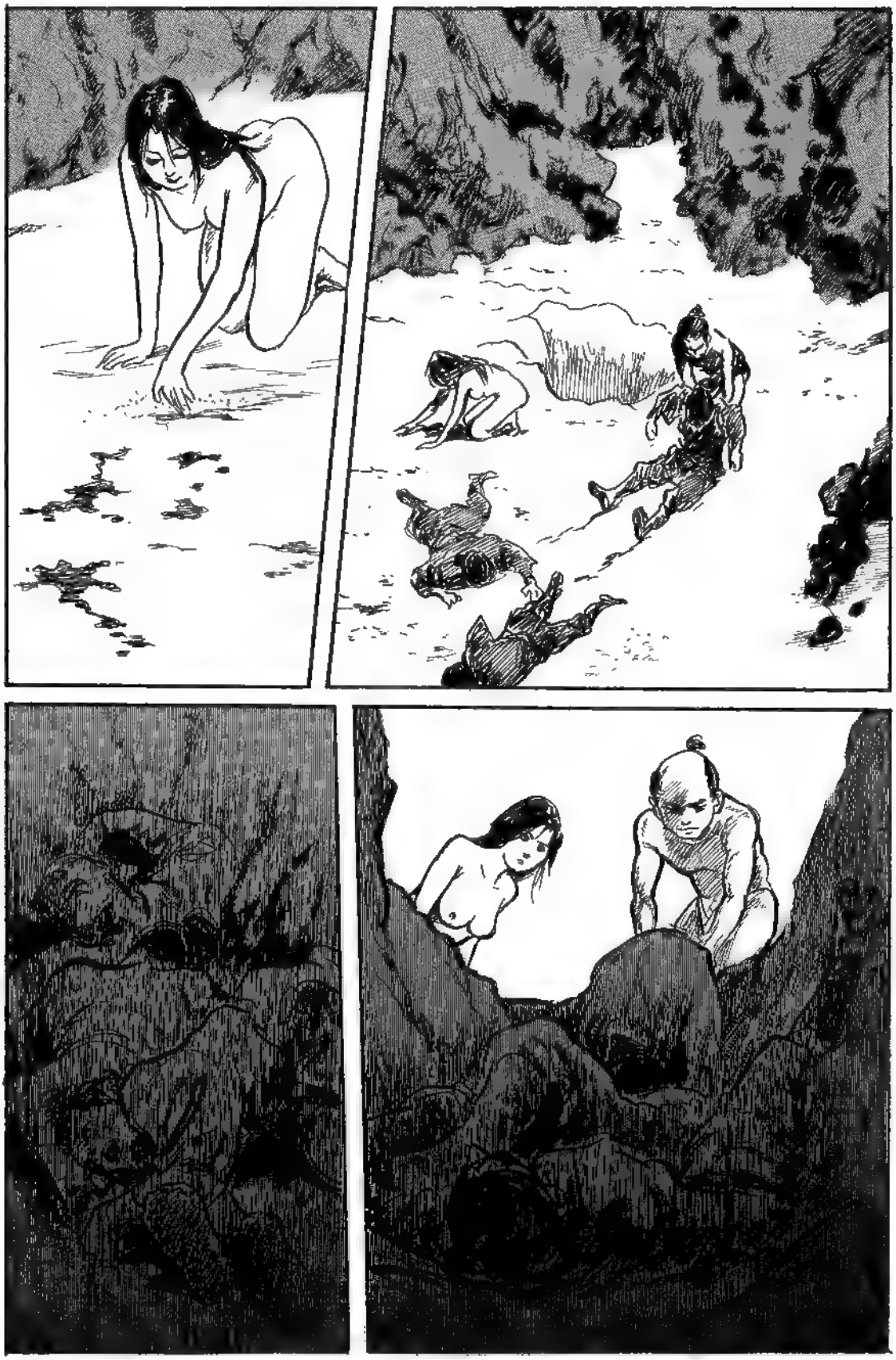

WERE YOU GOING TO SILENCE HER WITH DEATH?
SLEEP... SIX TIMES...?
IN IGA, THEY SAY "SLEEP SIX TIMES AND LISTEN TO THE WOMAN'S BOSOM."
SAY IT.
HMPH.
LEARN HER TRUE HEART AFTER THAT. THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS.
BE IT IN PEACE OR IN VIOLENCE, ONCE YOU LIE WITH A WOMAN, YOU MUST DO IT SIX TIMES.


IF SHE DIDN'T OPEN HER HEART TO ME AFTER THE SIXTH TIME, I WOULD'VE KILLED HER.
PASS THE TIME WITH THE *MIZUKI* IN LEISURE.
YOU NEED NOT SERVE ME UNTIL YOU COUNT SEVEN DAYS, STARTING TONIGHT.
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
BUT YOU GOT YOUR ANSWER THE FIRST TIME!
AS OF TOMORROW NIGHT, I'LL BE SLEEPING WITH A WOMAN. I'LL LIE WITH HER SIX TIMES FOR SIX DAYS.
M-- MILORD...


LET ME PUT IT THIS WAY. I LEARNED THE EMBARRASSMENT OF BEING WATCHED BY WATCHING YOU.
I CAN'T BEAR TO HAVE YOU WATCH ME DOING IT. HA HA HA HA.
THAT'S WHY I'M SAYING YOU NEED NOT SERVE ME IN THE DARK.
EVEN IF YOU DIDN'T, I WOULDN'T FEEL COMFORTABLE, THINKING YOU MIGHT. HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
YOU MIGHT AS WELL DISAPPEAR UNDER THE SEA WITH YOUR *MIZUKI*. HA HA HA HA HA.
BESIDES, NOW THAT THE *NOKIZARU* WERE KILLED, SECURITY WITHIN THE TERRITORY IS LIKELY TO TIGHTEN.


SLEEP SIX TIMES AND LISTEN, HUH?
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
THAT SOUNDS GOOD TO ME.


ALL RIGHT
HEH HEH HEH HEH
HANZŌ WAS RELIEVED THAT THE ACTIONS AND WORDS OF HIS MASTER WERE NOT OFF THE MARK AND HE WAS PROUD THAT HE SERVED HIM




YOU'RE WITH ME.
AREN'T YOU SCARED?
I'M SCARED OF LOSING YOU.


AKUYA.
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
THE NAME YOU GAVE ME IS MY NAME.
Y-- YOU...
YES.
AKUYA.





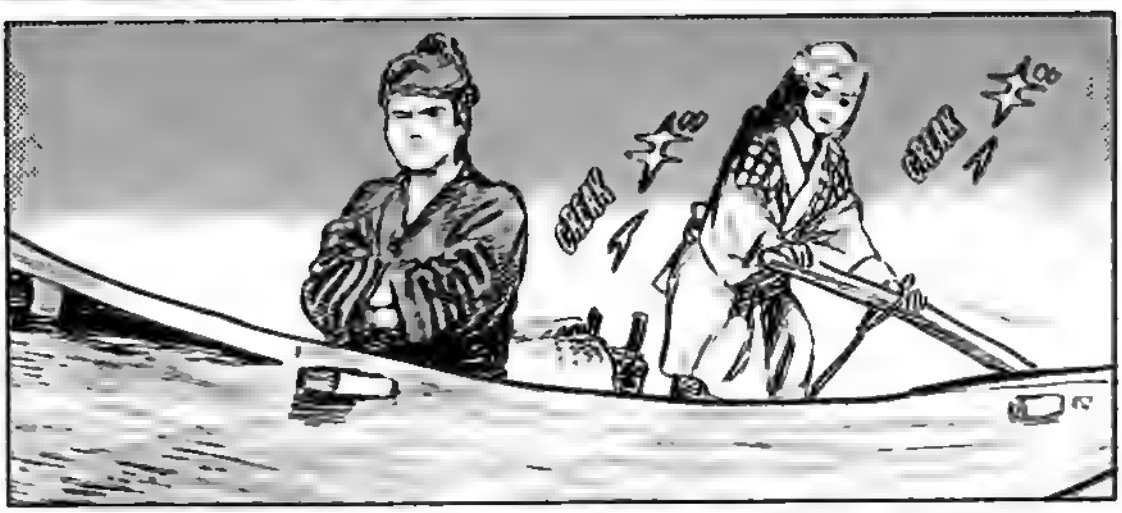


# Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

# No. 4: Oppres-sive Night of Ass

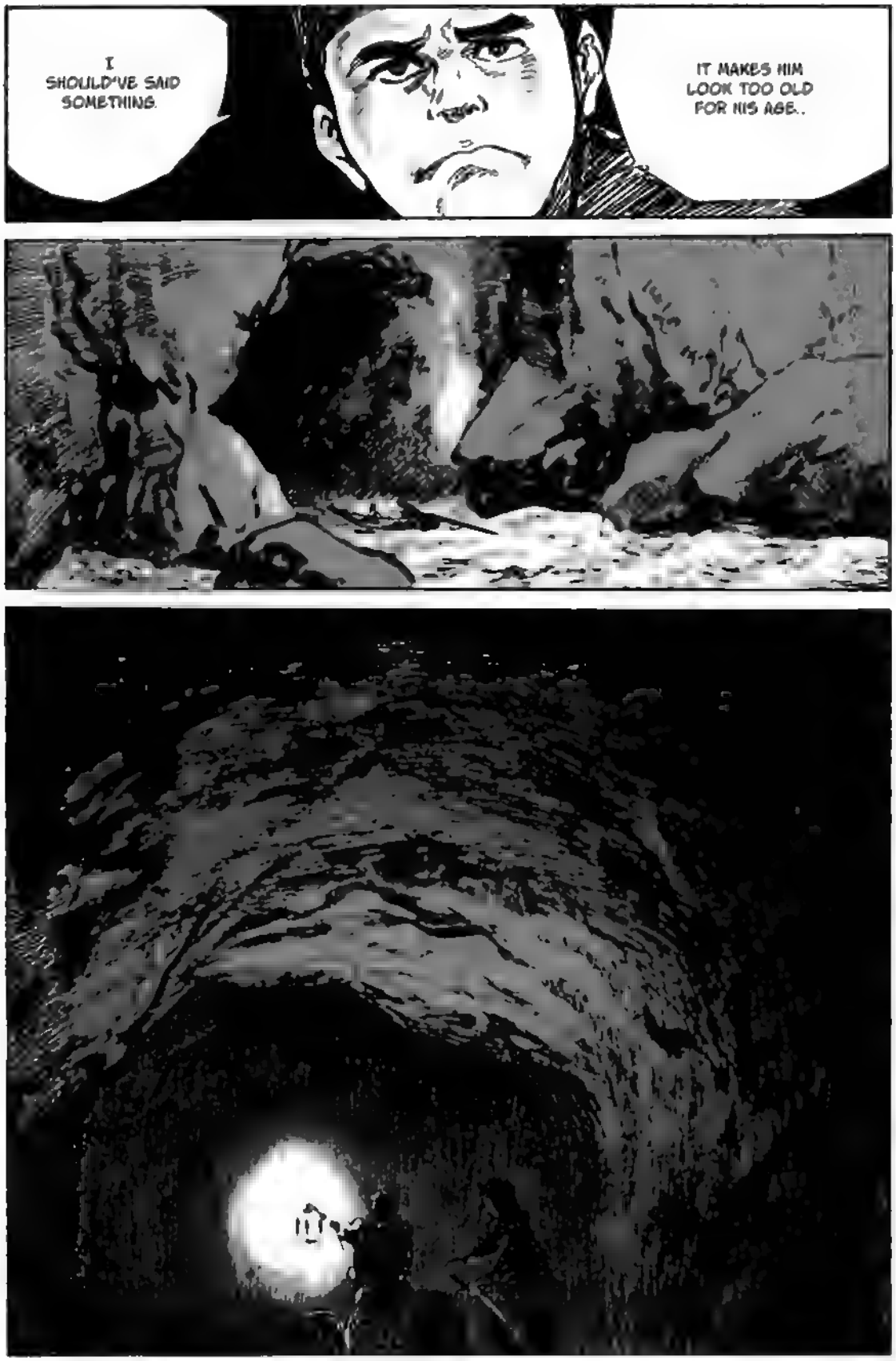





CREAK
CREAK




DARLING
CREAK
CREAK

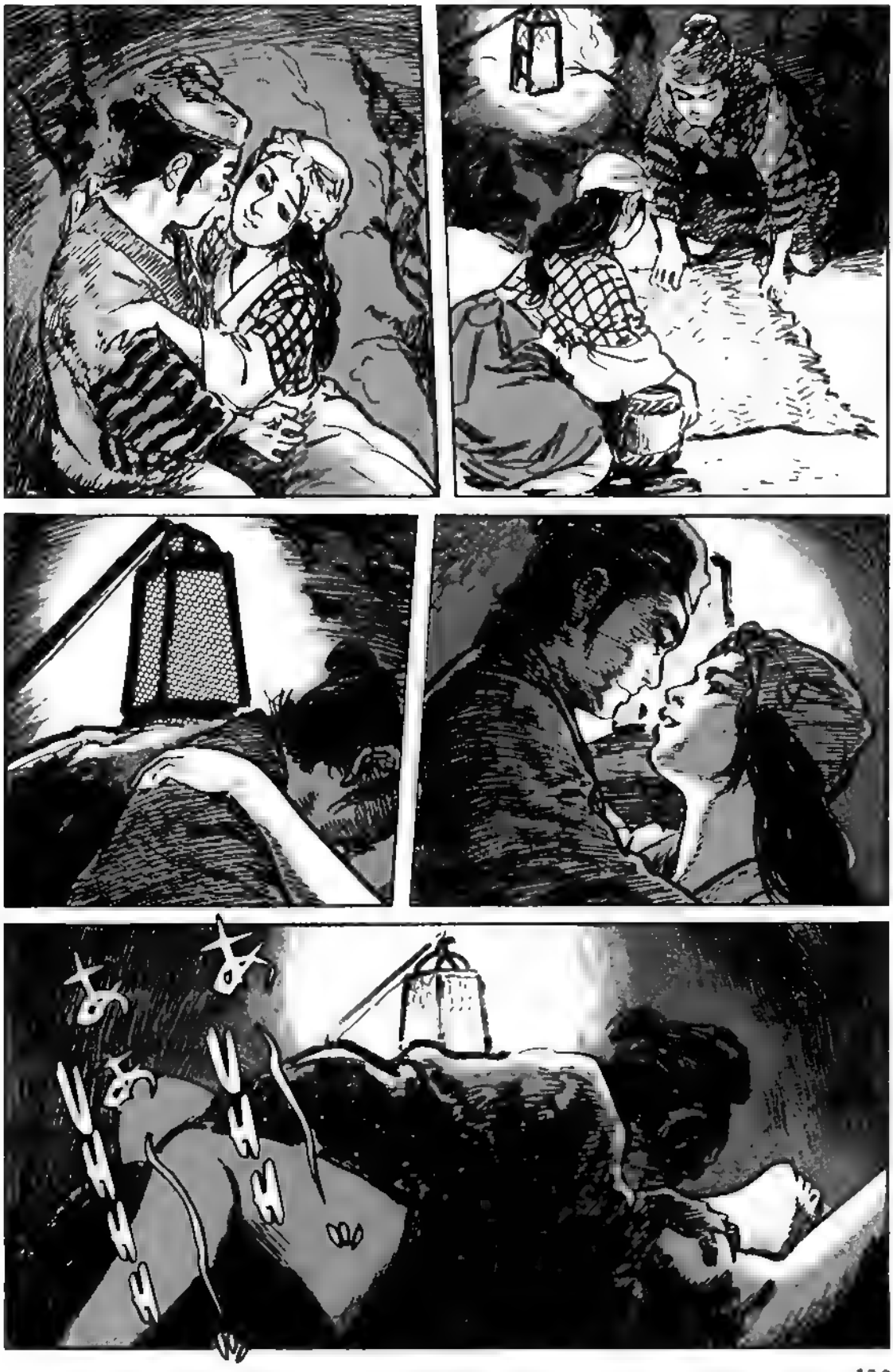

I SHOULD'VE SAID SOMETHING.
IT MAKES HIM LOOK TOO OLD FOR HIS AGE..



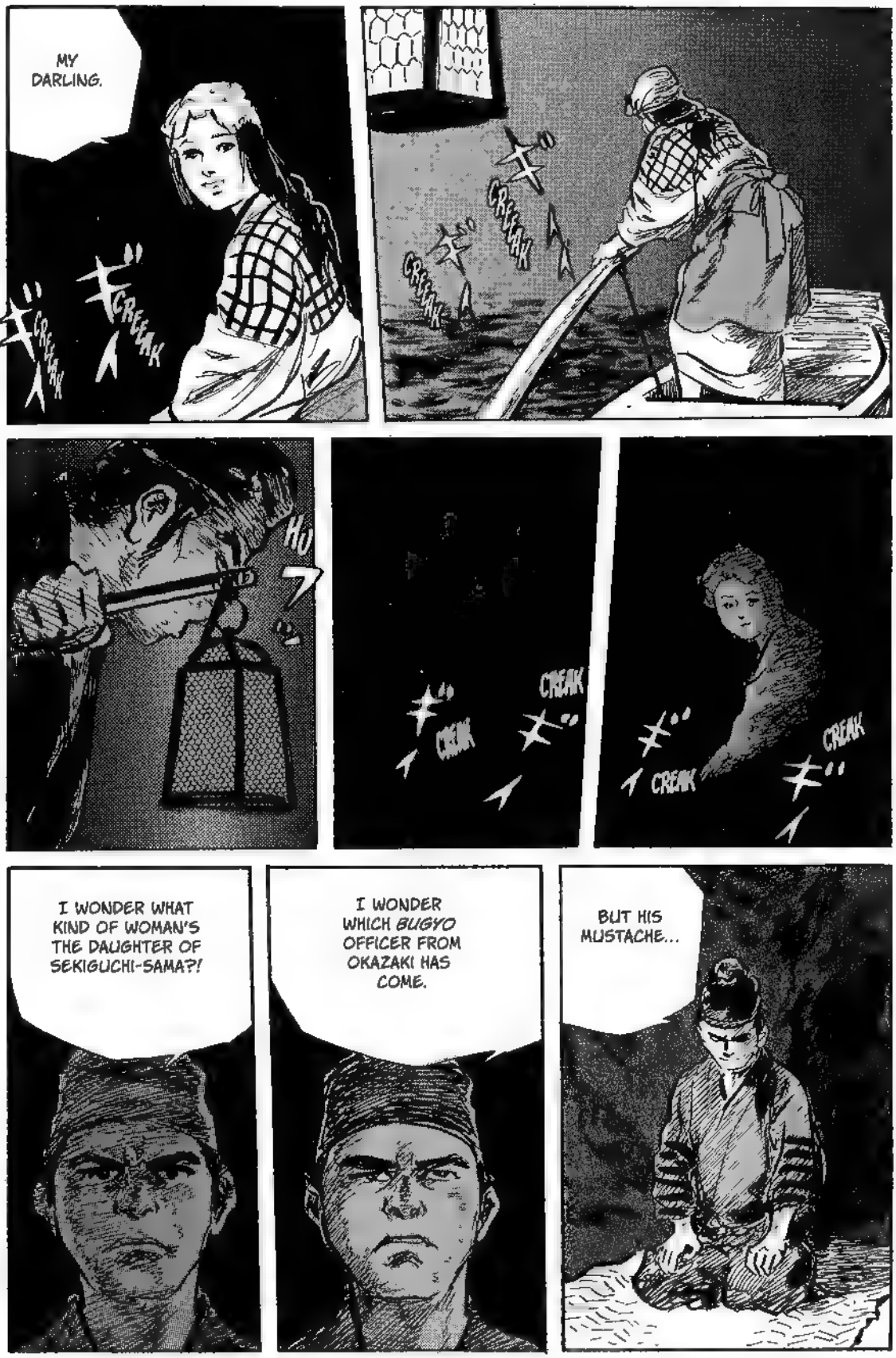


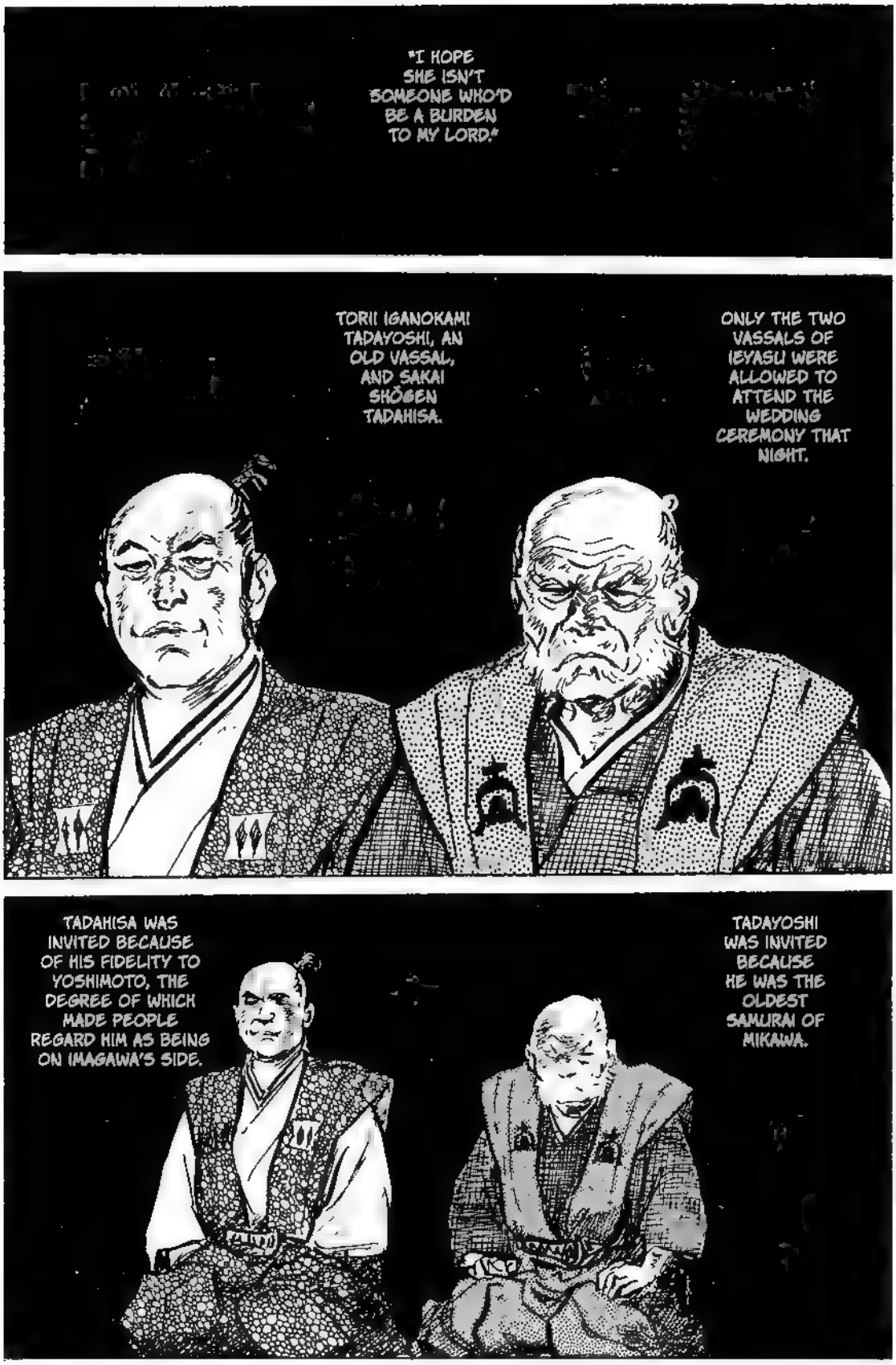



NO ONE WILL COME HERE EVEN IF THEY START PROBING




OHHHHHHHH
UHHHHH
OHHH
OH
I'LL BE BACK TOMORROW AT DAWN

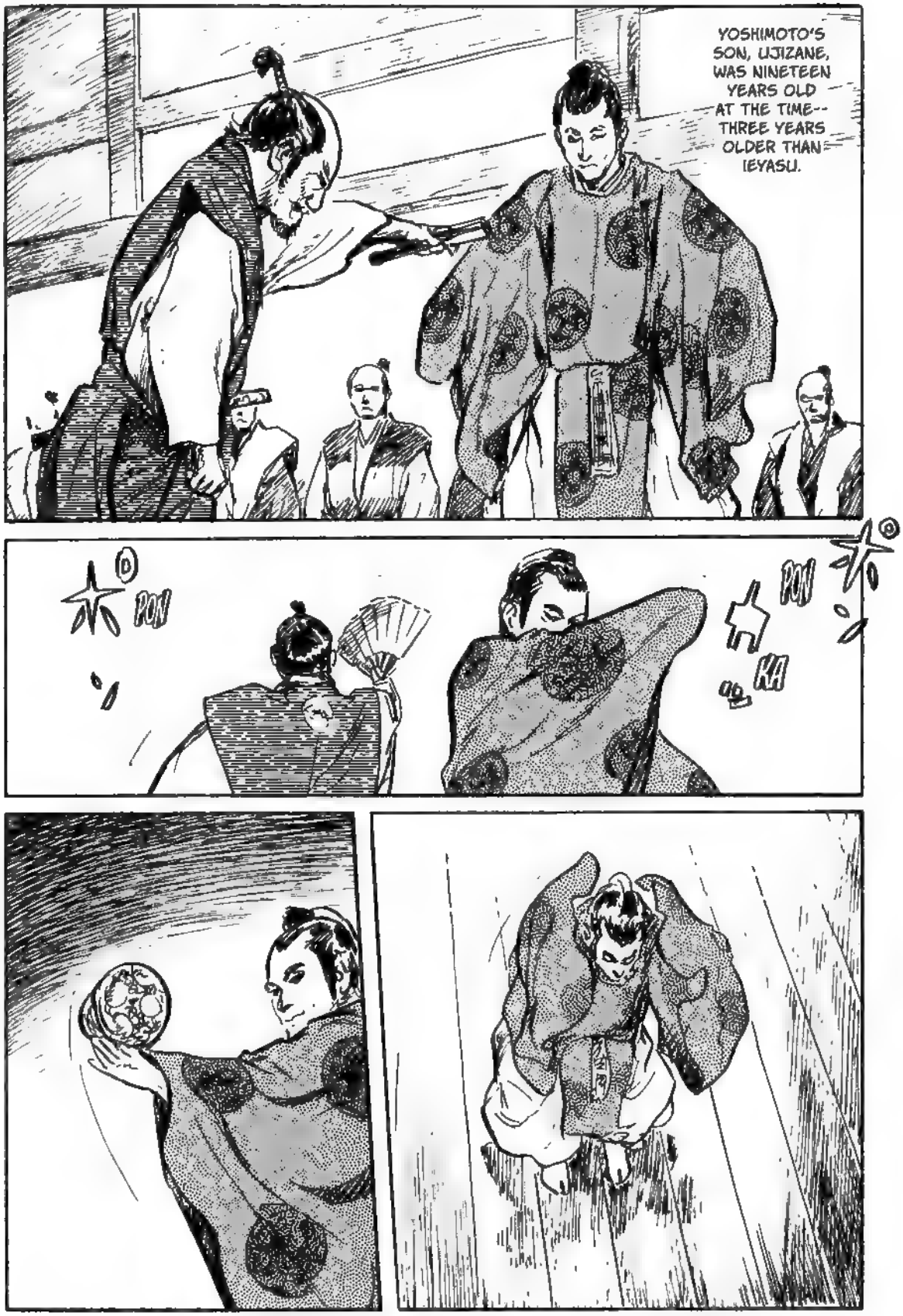

MY DARLING.
CREEAK
CREEAK
CREEAK
CREEAK
HU
CREAK
CREAK
CREAK
CREAK
I WONDER WHAT KIND OF WOMAN'S THE DAUGHTER OF SEKIGUCHI-SAMA?!
I WONDER WHICH BUGYO OFFICER FROM OKAZAKI HAS COME.
BUT HIS MUSTACHE...

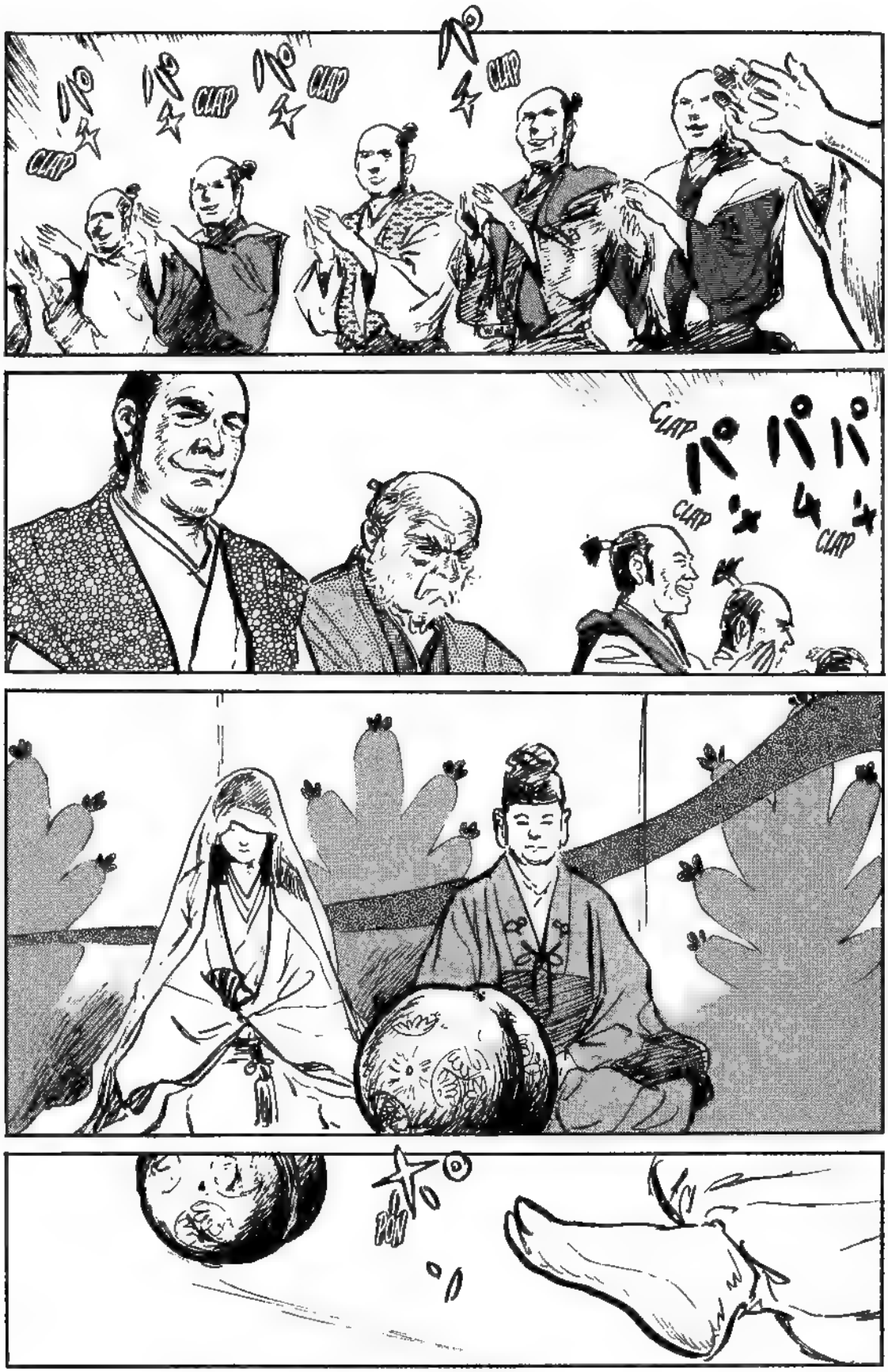

*I HOPE SHE ISN'T SOMEONE WHO'D BE A BURDEN TO MY LORD.*
TORII IGANOKAMI TADAYOSHI, AN OLD VASSAL, AND SAKAI SHŌBEN TADAHISA.
ONLY THE TWO VASSALS OF IEYASU WERE ALLOWED TO ATTEND THE WEDDING CEREMONY THAT NIGHT.
TADAHISA WAS INVITED BECAUSE OF HIS FIDELITY TO YOSHIMOTO, THE DEGREE OF WHICH MADE PEOPLE REGARD HIM AS BEING ON IMAGAWA'S SIDE.
TADAYOSHI WAS INVITED BECAUSE HE WAS THE OLDEST SAMURAI OF MIKAWA.


HE WAS IN A GREAT MOOD-- PLEASED ENOUGH TO PLAY THE DRUM HIMSELF TO CELEBRATE THE EVENT.
AS FOR YOSHIMOTO...
PON
PON
KA
PON




IT WAS THE FATHER OF THE BRIDE, SEKIGUCHI YOSHIHIRO, WHO DANCED TO THE DRUM. HE HAD YOSHIMOTO'S SISTER AS HIS WIFE AND WAS THE KEY VASSAL OF THE IMAGAWA CLAN
PLEASE JOIN ME, UJIZANE-SAMA.

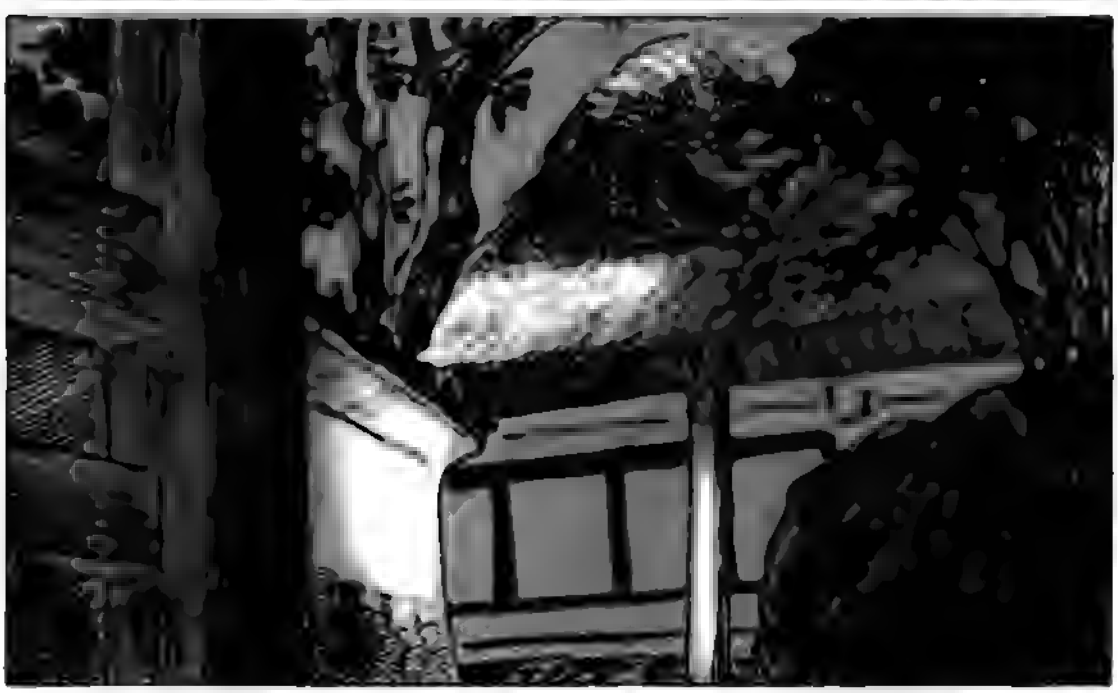

YOSHIMOTO'S SON, UJIZANE, WAS NINETEEN YEARS OLD AT THE TIME-- THREE YEARS OLDER THAN IEYASU.
PON
PON
KA

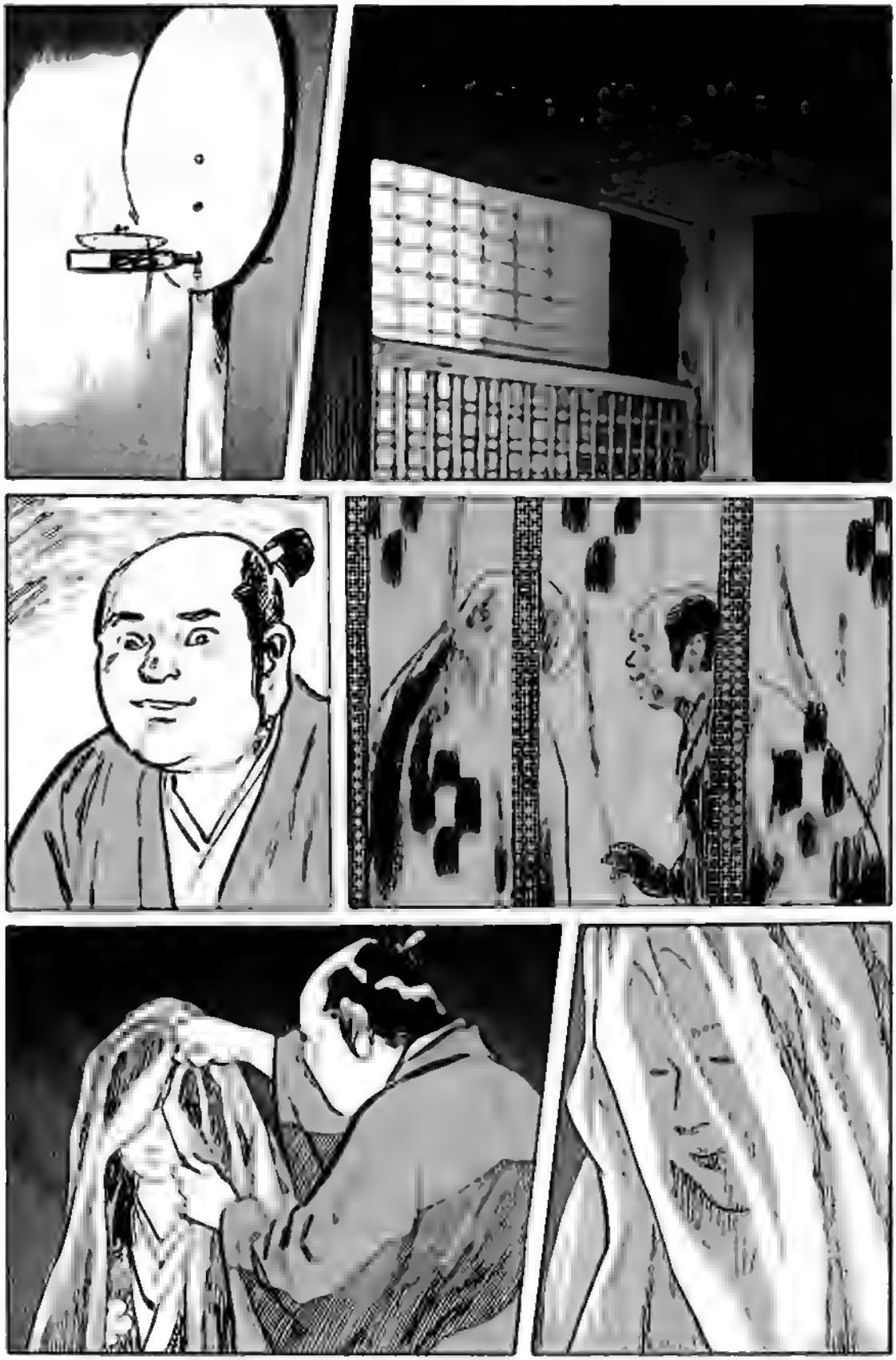

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PON


PON
PON


UJIZANE, TOO, WAS INTOXICATED BY THE GREAT PLEASURE...
PON
...OF WATCHING THIS YOUNG MAN ABOUT TO EMBRACE A BRIDE WHO HAD ALREADY BEEN UJIZANE'S WOMAN.
...WAS IN FULL SWING.
ON THE NIGHT OF THE FIFTEENTH DAY OF THE MONTH IN KŌJI YEAR THREE, THE WEDDING CEREMONY AT THE IMAGAWA MANSION IN SUNPU...


आह



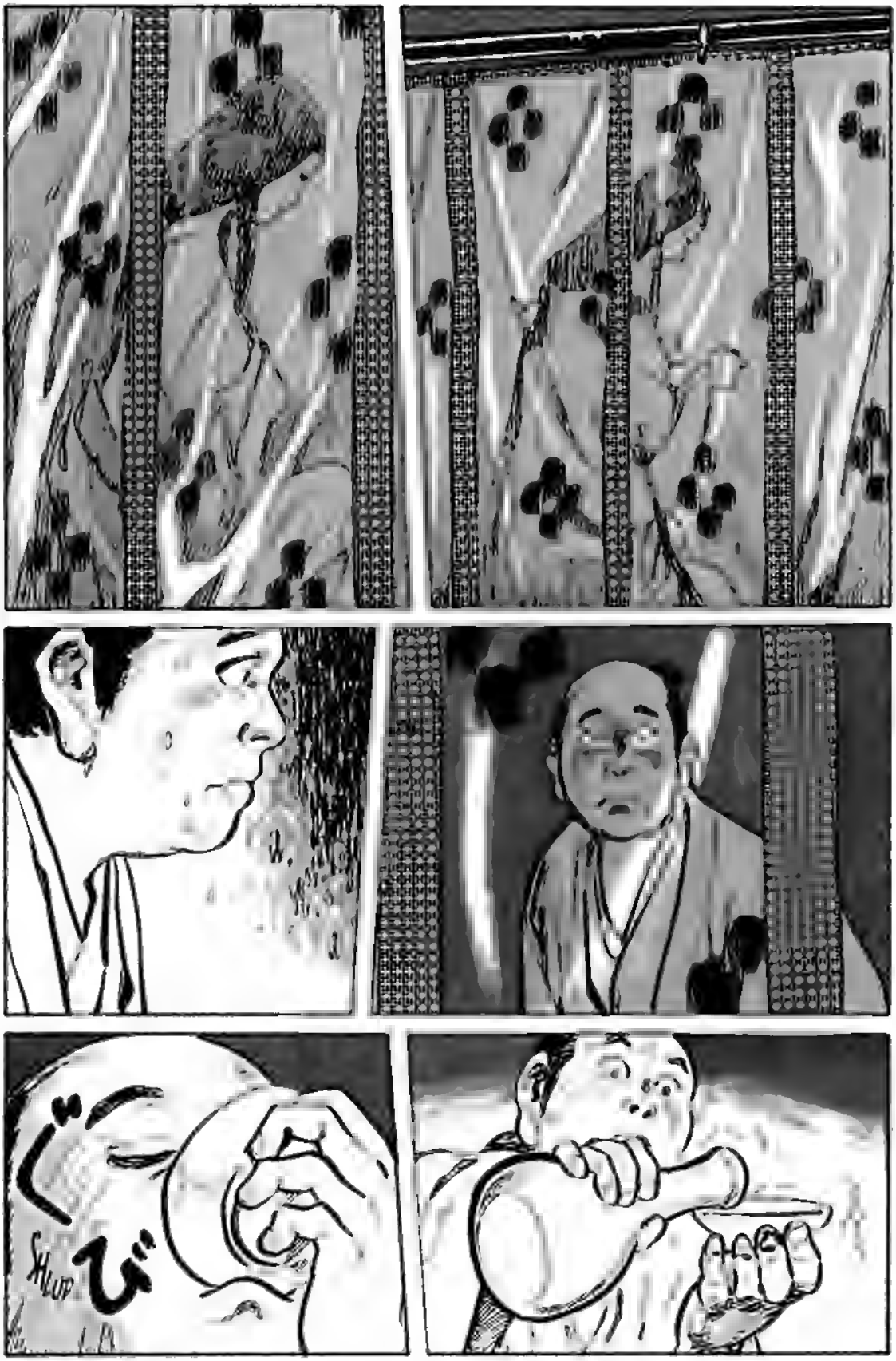





THAT'S WHAT KARMA IS.
WE'VE NEVER EXCHANGED EVEN A WORD BEFORE NOW. DON'T YOU THINK IT'S STRANGE?
WE'VE NEVER TALKED TO EACH OTHER UNTIL TODAY... BUT NOW WE SIT SO CLOSE AS HUSBAND AND WIFE.
A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN IS A STRANGE THING, INDEED.
KARMA... I SEE. HMM.
YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL... VERY BEAUTIFUL.
MY KARMA... IS TO BE UNITED WITH A GORGEOUS WOMAN LIKE YOU, I SUPPOSE.


MAY I TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT YOU?
I GLIMPSED YOU IN PASSING BEFORE...
BUT I NEVER KNEW... HOW HANDSOME YOU ARE.


GULP



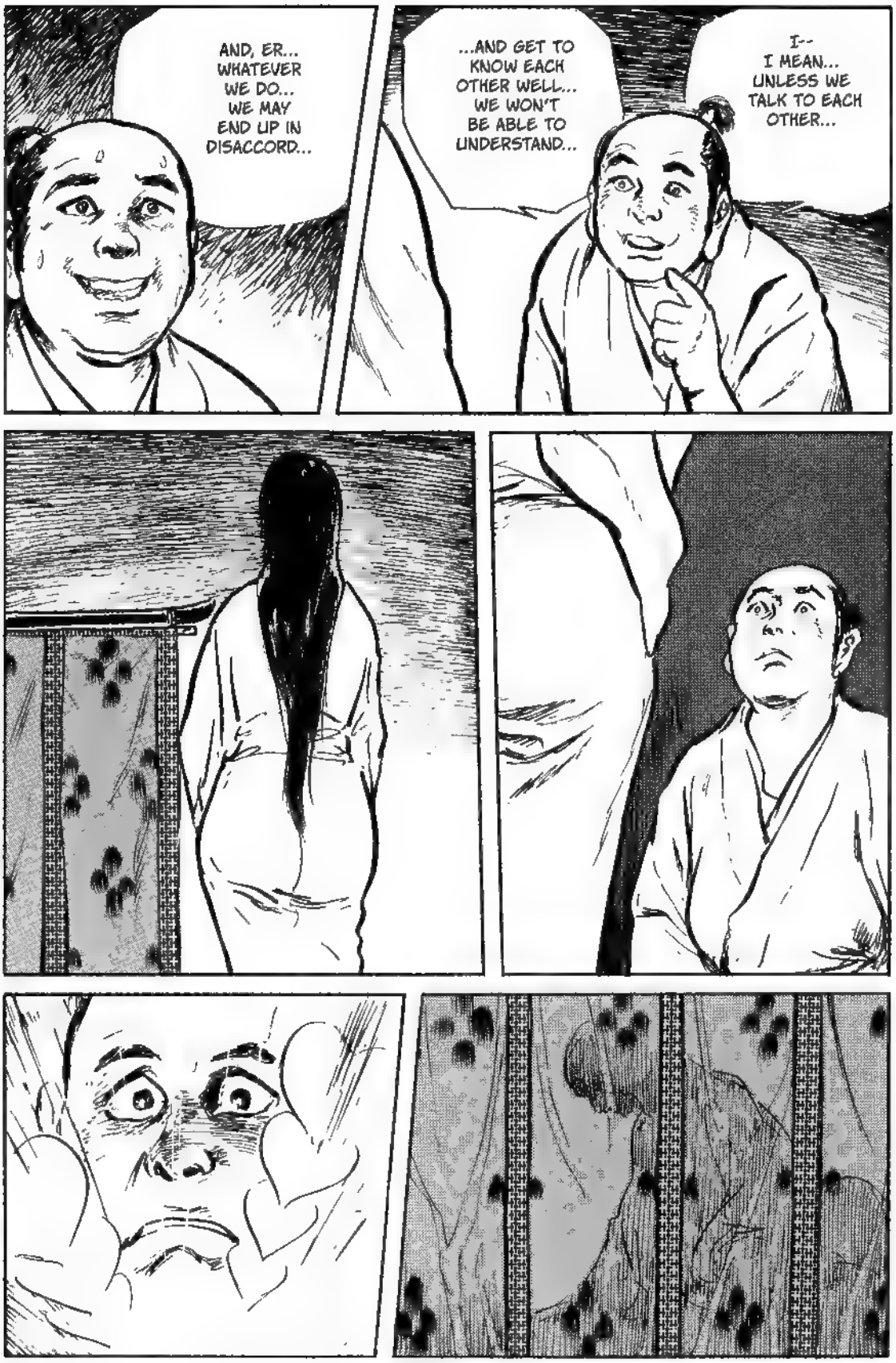

HUU
I--
I BELIEVE
WE'RE SAME
AGE...
DON'T
YOU FEEL...
FEAR...
OR
EMBARRASSMENT...
AT ALL?
BUT...
DESPITE THAT...
YOU'RE SO CALM...
I MEAN...
NOT AT ALL
NERVOUS...

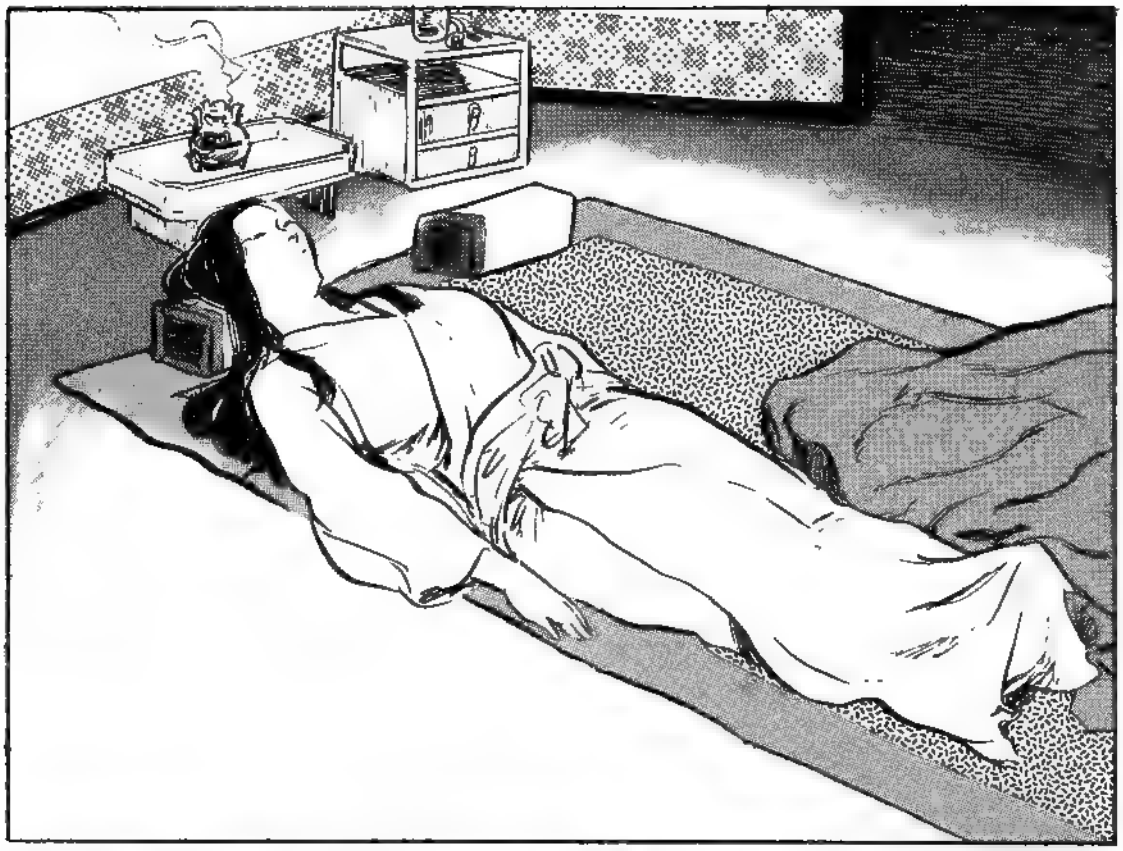

OH WELL... ER... UM... UM...
Y--YEAH, BUT...
YOU WILL FROM NOW ON.
I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT YOU.

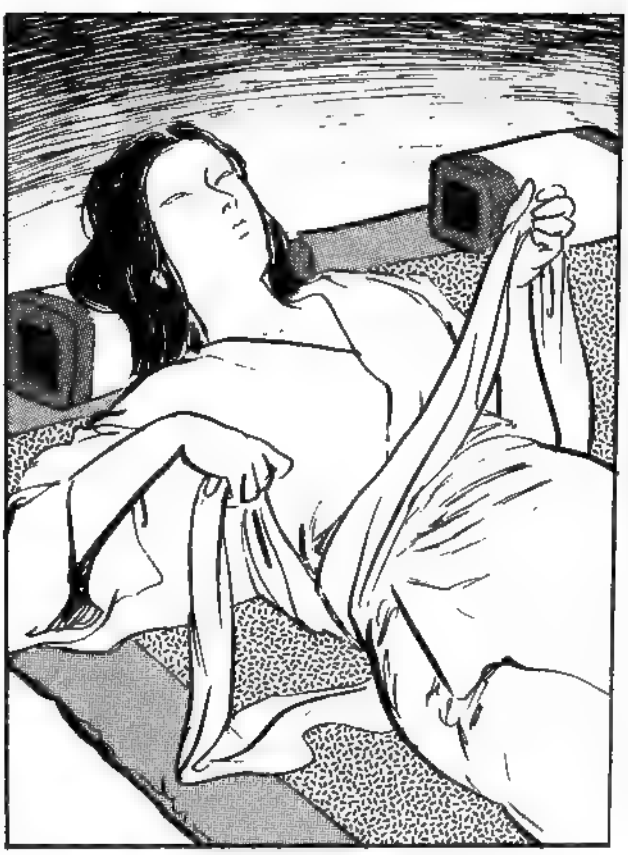

I MEAN... AS IF YOU'RE USED TO IT... UM... UH... I DON'T KNOW...
YOU SEEM TO KNOW EVERYTHING...
OH... SURE.
MAY I HAVE SOME?


AND WHO GAVE YOU THAT NAME... WAS IT YOUR FATHER?
WHY ARE YOU CALLED TSUKIYAMA-DONO?
HŌSEI CHIKUZAN...?
IT MEANS HŌSEI CHIKUZAN.
O-- OYAKATA-SAMA... DID...?
IT WAS OYAKATA- - SAMA.
THE IDEA IS TO BECOME A WOMAN CAPABLE OF BUILDING A MOUNTAIN AND HOLDING A STAR IN HER ARMS.
ER... YEAH.
HUH?
IT MEANS "BUILDING A MOUNTAIN AND HOLDING A STAR."


HMM...
...AND WILL EVENTUALLY LET ME HOLD A STAR IN MY ARMS. THAT'S WHAT *OYAKATASAMA* SAID TO ME.
A WOMAN'S LIFE IS HARD, RIDDLED WITH SUFFERING, BUT IF I CAN DELIVER LOTS OF CHILDREN THEY WILL BE MY MOUNTAIN...
B--BY THE WAY... WHAT DO YOU THINK OF ME?
SLUP
HMPH...
I GET IT.
I MEAN... AS YOUR PARTNER... FOR *HOSEI CHIKUZAN*.


AND, ER... WHATEVER WE DO... WE MAY END UP IN DISACCORD...
...AND GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER WELL... WE WON'T BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND...
I-- I MEAN... UNLESS WE TALK TO EACH OTHER...



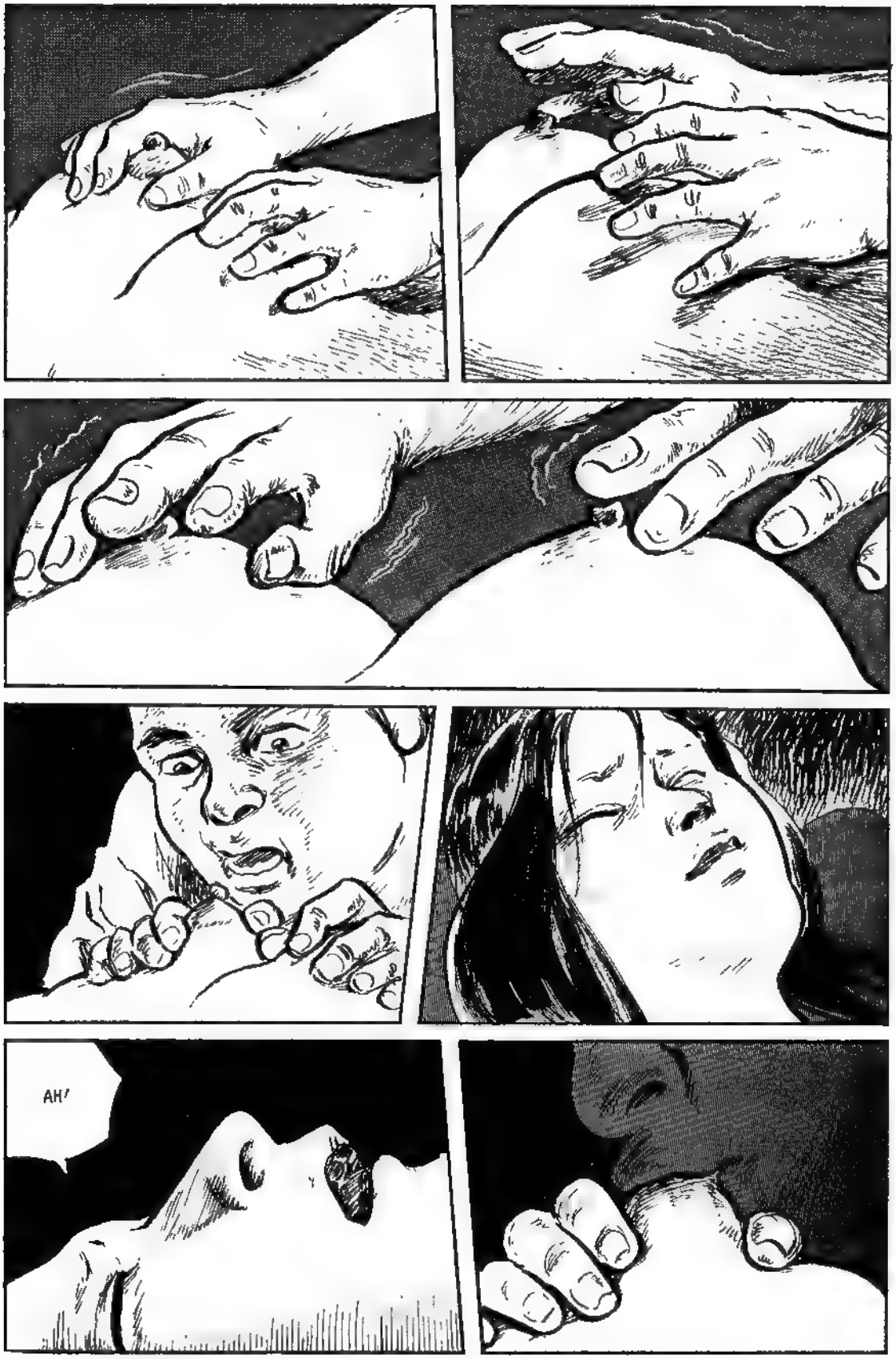


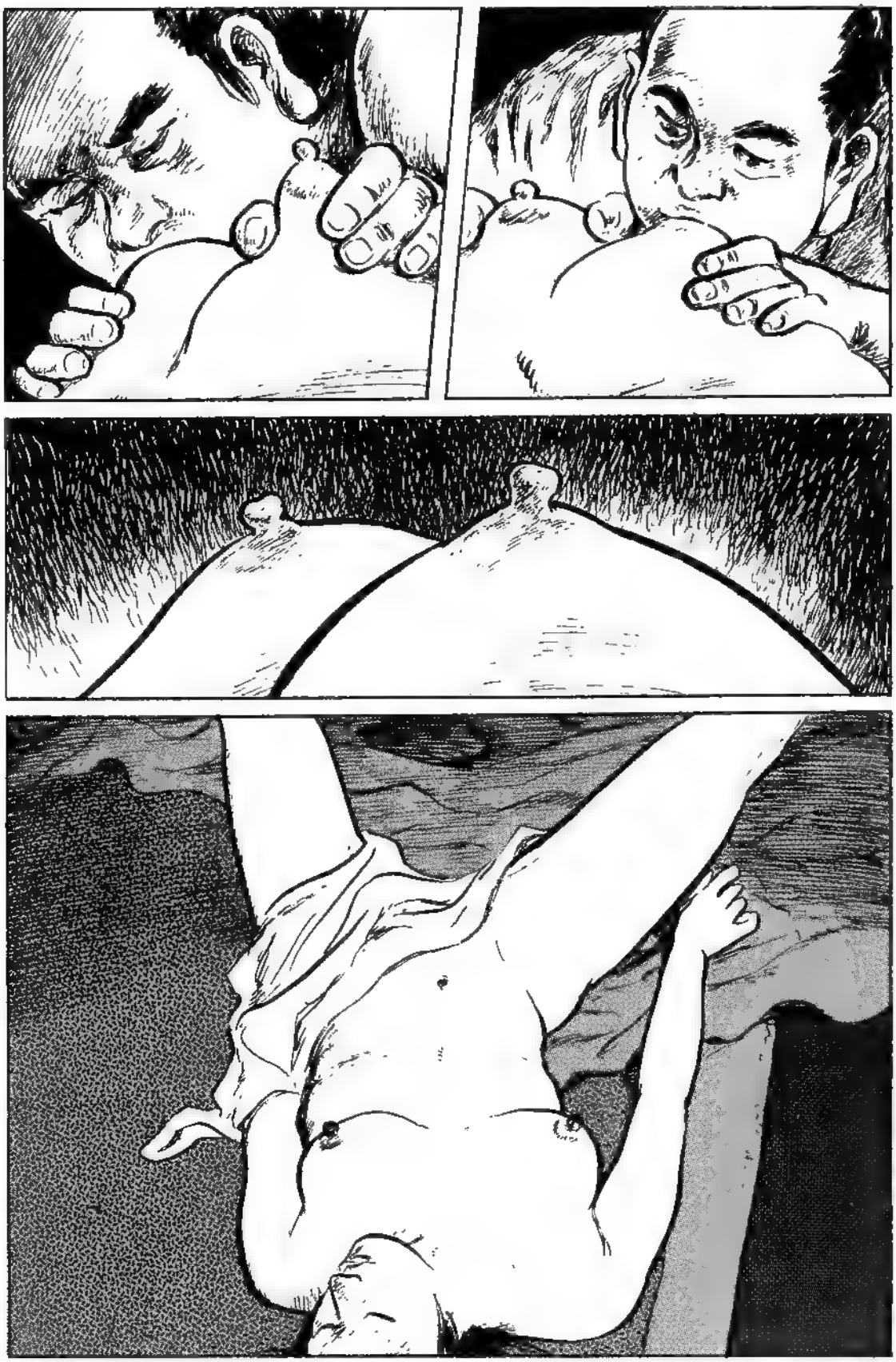



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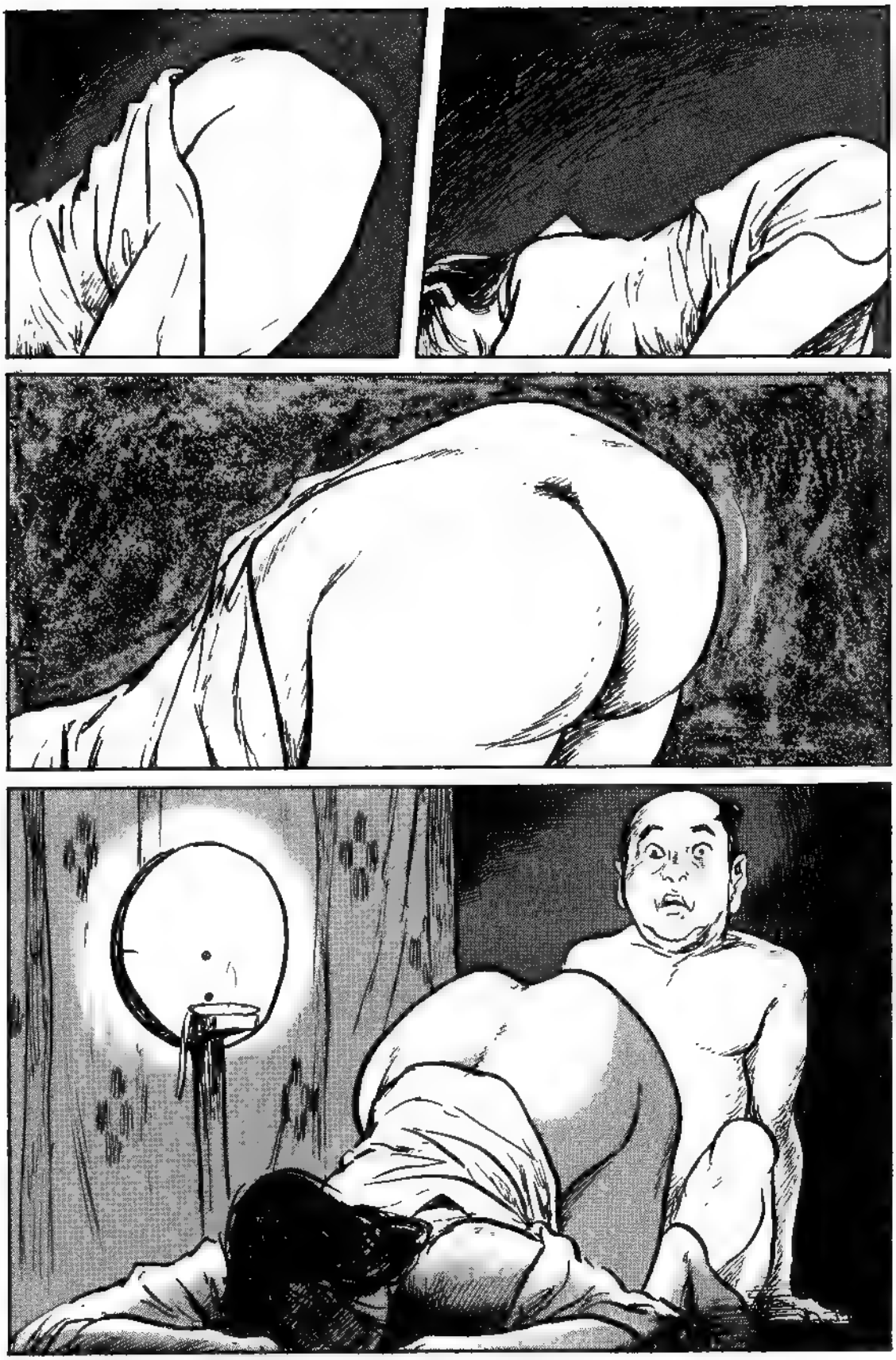

AH!




H--
HOW DO
I...?
I CAN'T...
DO IT
RIGHT...
S--
SOMEHOW...


SPIT!
OH!
HUH...?
HMM...

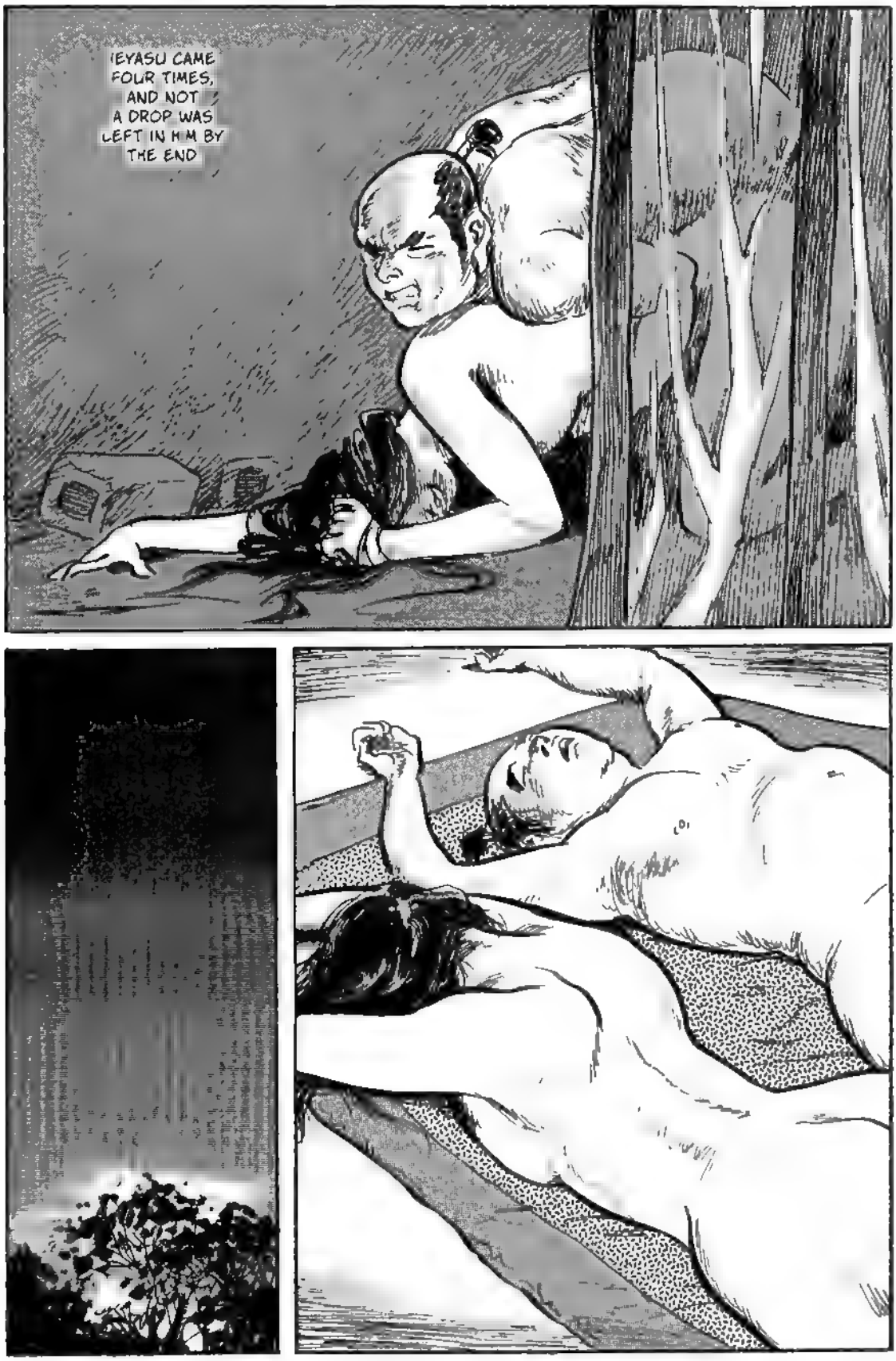

... MAKE US FIT RIGHT?
H-- HOW DO I...
IT--IT SLIPS OUT... RIGHT... AWAY...
MY FINGERS CAN ENTER... SO I SHOULD, TOO...



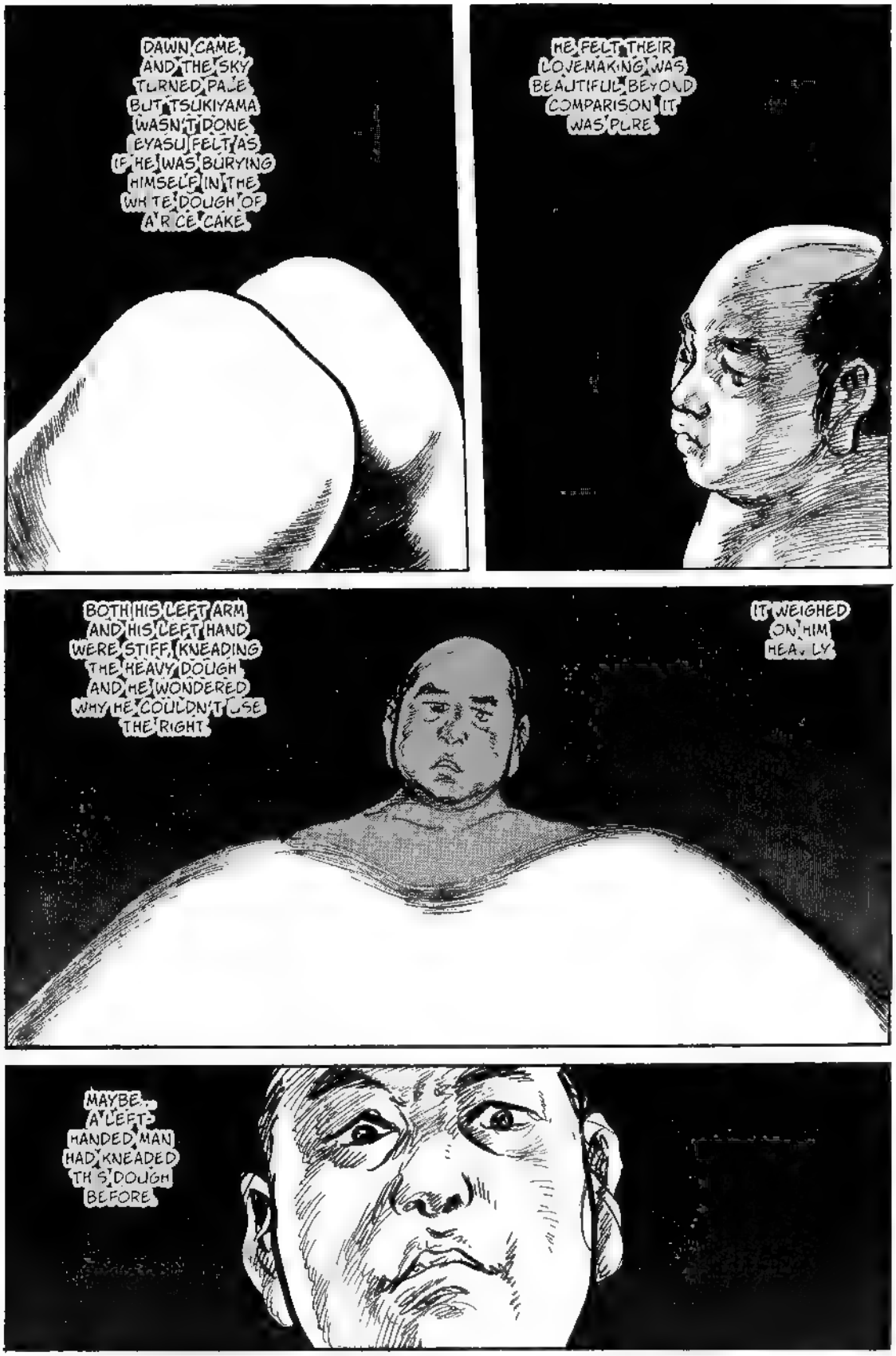

O--
OHH...
UHHH...
HM!
IS THIS
HOW?!
AH.
HM...
AH...

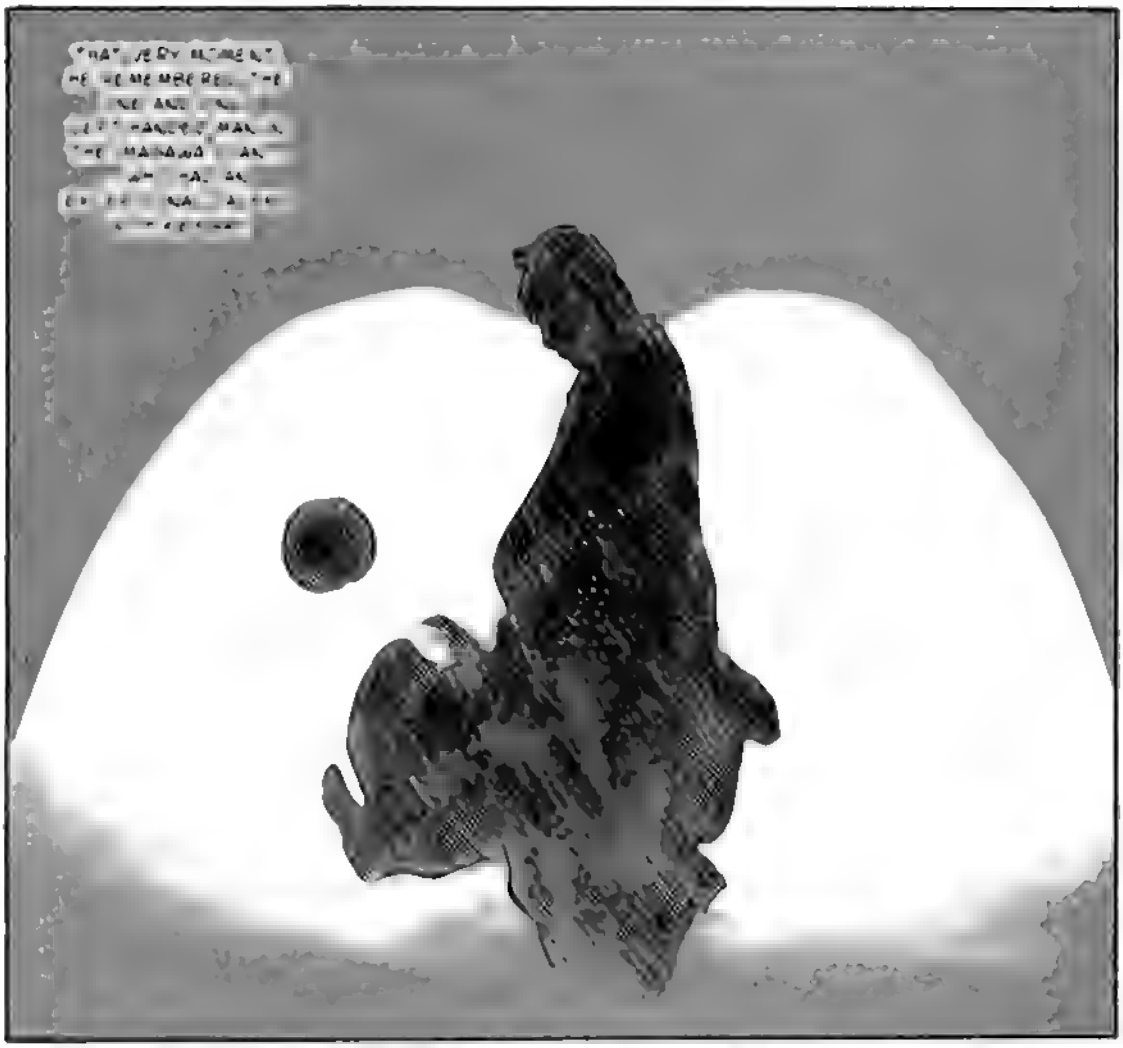

M--
MORE...
MORE.
AH...
N-
NOT
YET...


OHHH
Q--
QUICK
OH...OO
OH...


IEYASU CAME FOUR TIMES, AND NOT A DROP WAS LEFT IN H M BY THE END



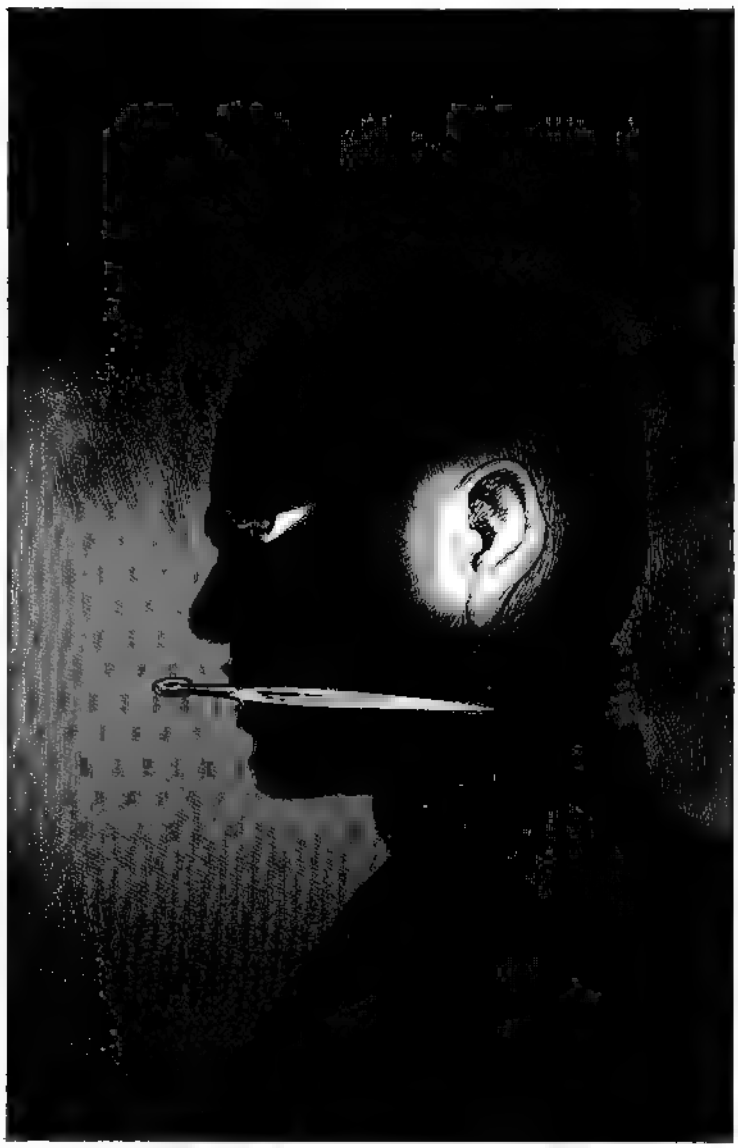

DAWN CAME, AND THE SKY TURNED PALE BUT TSUKIYAMA WASN'T DONE. EYASU FELT AS IF HE WAS BURYING HIMSELF IN THE WHITE DOUGH OF A RICE CAKE.
HE FELT THEIR LOVEMAKING WAS BEAUTIFUL BEYOND COMPARISON. IT WAS PURE.
BOTH HIS LEFT ARM AND HIS LEFT HAND WERE STIFF, KNEADING THE HEAVY DOUGH AND HE WONDERED WHY HE COULDN'T USE THE RIGHT.
IT WEIGHED ON HIM HEAVILY.
MAYBE A LEFT-HANDED MAN HAD KNEADED THIS DOUGH BEFORE.

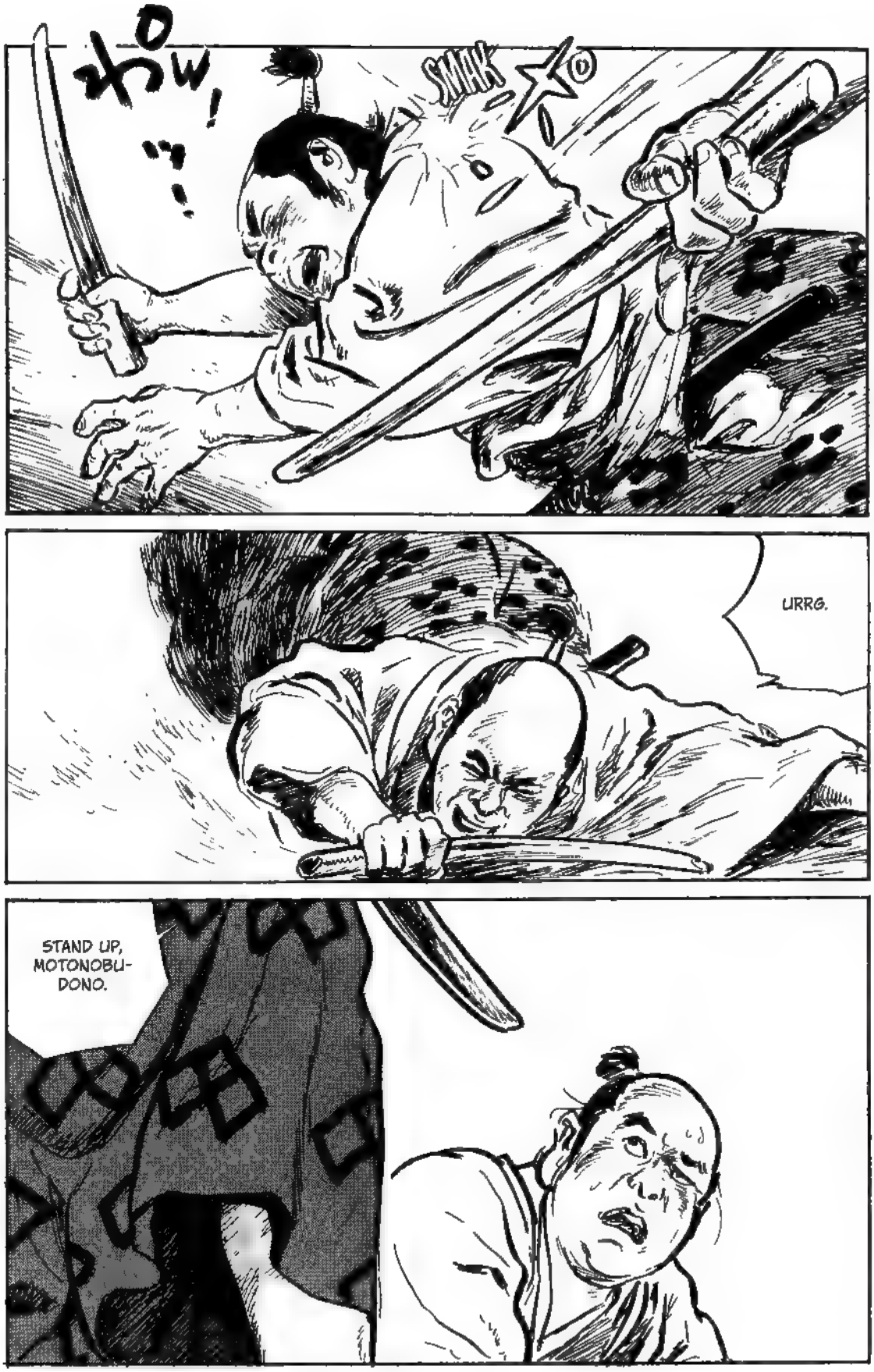




# Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

# No. 5: Jisatsu Technique




SMAK
URRG.
STAND UP, MOTONOBU-DONO.


COME ON.





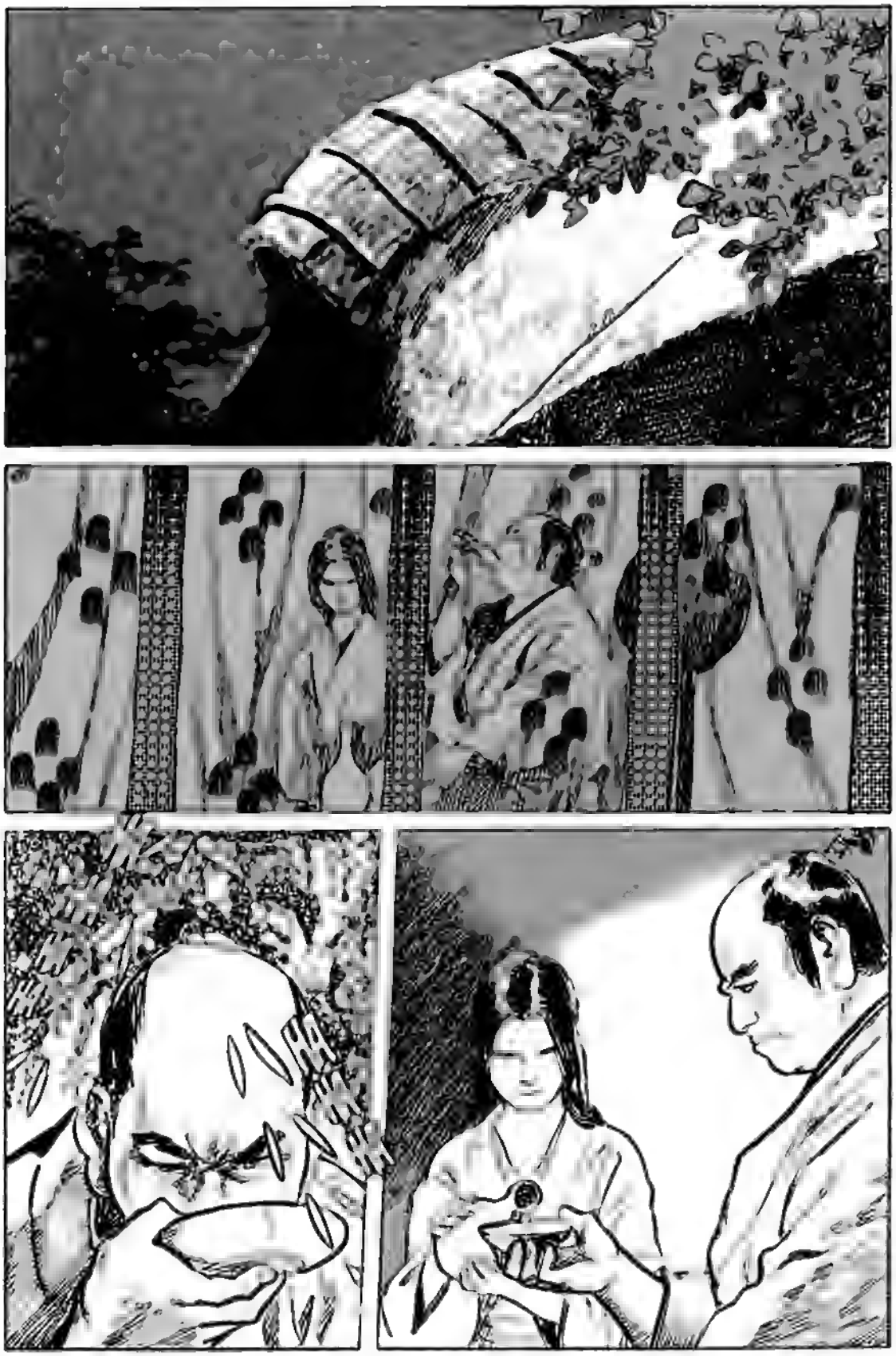

A SAMURAI OF MIKAWA SHOULD BE ASHAMED IF THAT'S ALL IT TAKES TO MAKE HIM FALL.
COME ON, MOTONOBU-DONO!
NOW, COME GET ME!
ああーー
AAAA


HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HO
HO
HO


HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA HA HA
BUT LOOKING AT YOU, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK.
FROM WHAT I HEAR, YOU IMPROVED A LOT WHEN SESSAI-DONO WAS STILL ALIVE AND TAUGHT YOU HIMSELF
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA


BESIDES, MOTONOBU IS NATURALLY CHUBBY AND BORN CLUMSY AFTER ALL.
HA HA HA HA HA. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE AGAINST YOU, ASAHINA YASUYOSHI, YOU'RE THE STRONGEST ONE IN THE CLAN.
HA HA
HO HO
HO HO
HO
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA


MOTONOBU-DONO, YOU'D LOSE YOUR NECK AS SOON AS YOU JOINED US IN BATTLE. HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
IF YOU'D RATHER NOT, TRAIN YOURSELF A LITTLE MORE.
THA HA HA HA
THA HA HA



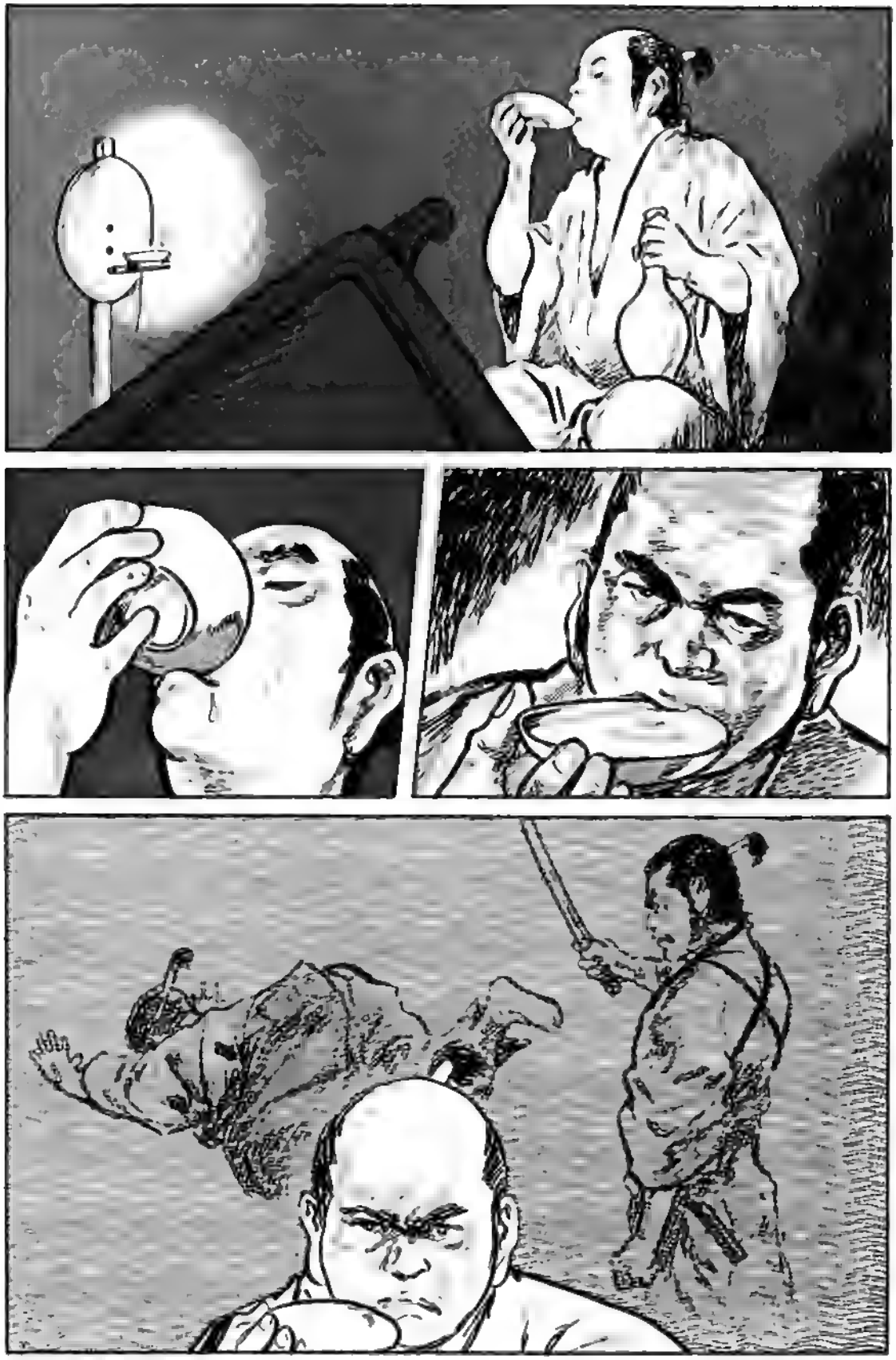

HA
HA
HA


HE DIDN'T HAVE TO MOCK ME LIKE THAT.
KANZŌ, ARE YOU AROUND?
KASHAAN
CRAP! HE TALKS SO BIG!
CAN YOU TAKE DOWN ASAHINA YASUYOSHI?
YES, SIR.


YOU SURE YOU CAN?
YES
HE'S WIDELY KNOWN FOR HIS PROWESS WITH A BLADE. THEY SAY NO ONE CAN MATCH HIM
IF YOU WISH.
IT SHOULDN'T BE THAT HARD.
IT'S AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TASK EVEN FOR AN *IGAMONO*. IF YOU CAN'T, JUST TELL ME.
DON'T BE TOO READY.
YOU'RE NOT TO SLIT HIS THROAT WHEN HE'S FAST ASLEEP! I'M TALKING ABOUT TAKING HIM DOWN FACE TO FACE.
WHAT?!

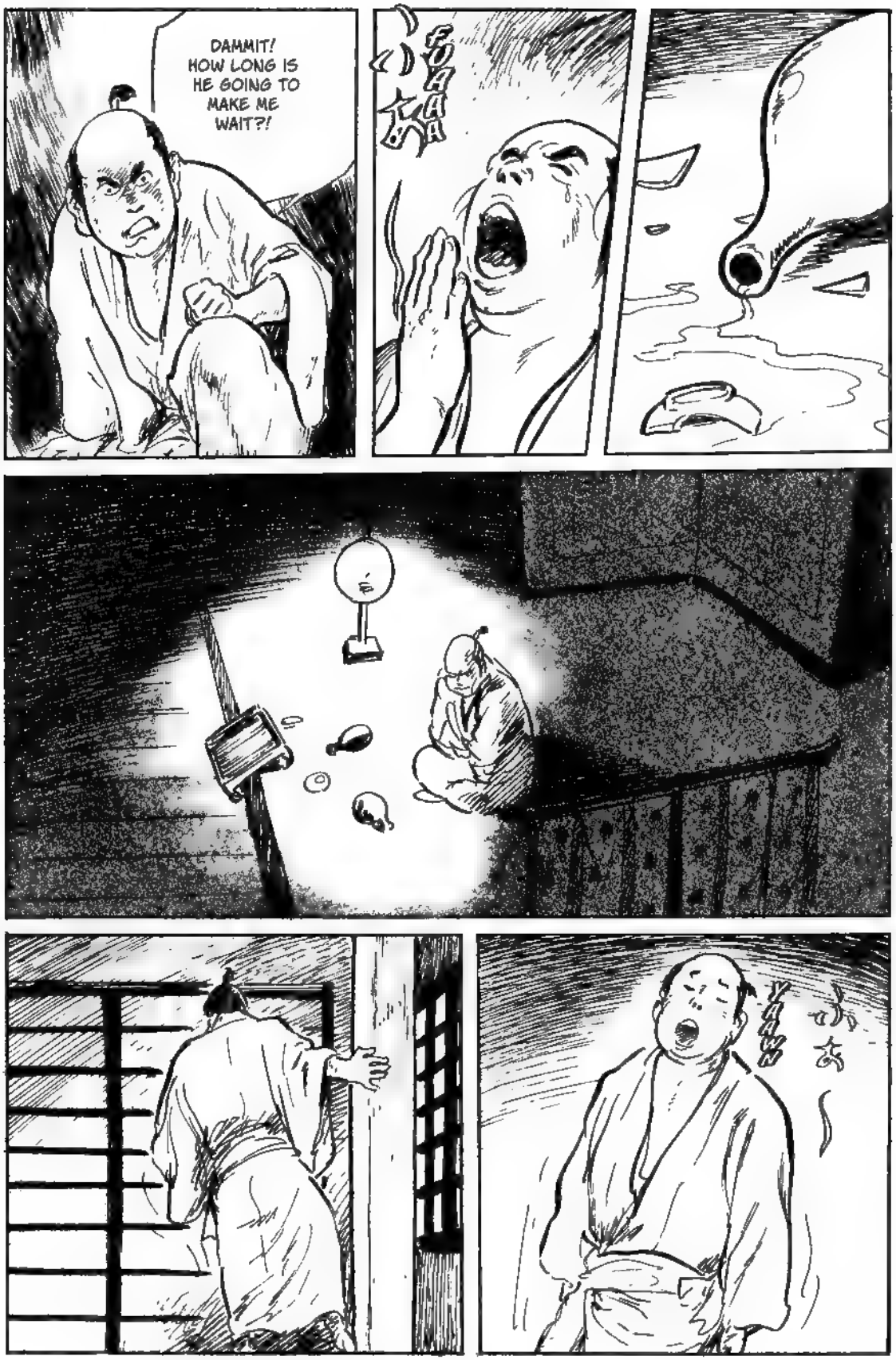

I'M JUST ASKING... IF IT'S POSSIBLE.
I-- I'M NOT ORDERING YOU TO DO IT.
YES.
H-- HANG ON!
RIGHT AWAY, SIR.
CAN YOU SHOW ME HOW? IN A CONVINCING WAY?
YES.
H-- HOW?!
YES, SIR.
THEN SHOW ME!






DOKRASSH!


HE SAYS HE CAN EASILY TAKE OUT ASAHINA YASUYOSHI-- A MAN WITH THAT MUCH SKILL!!
HANZŌ.
HE DISAPPEARED THE MOMENT I TOLD HIM TO PROVE HIMSELF.
ALL NOISE AND NOTHING TO IT.
OR ELSE YOU'LL NEVER HEAR THE END OF IT.
SHOW ME INDISPUTABLE PROOF!
WHERE ARE YOU, HANZŌ?!
BAM!

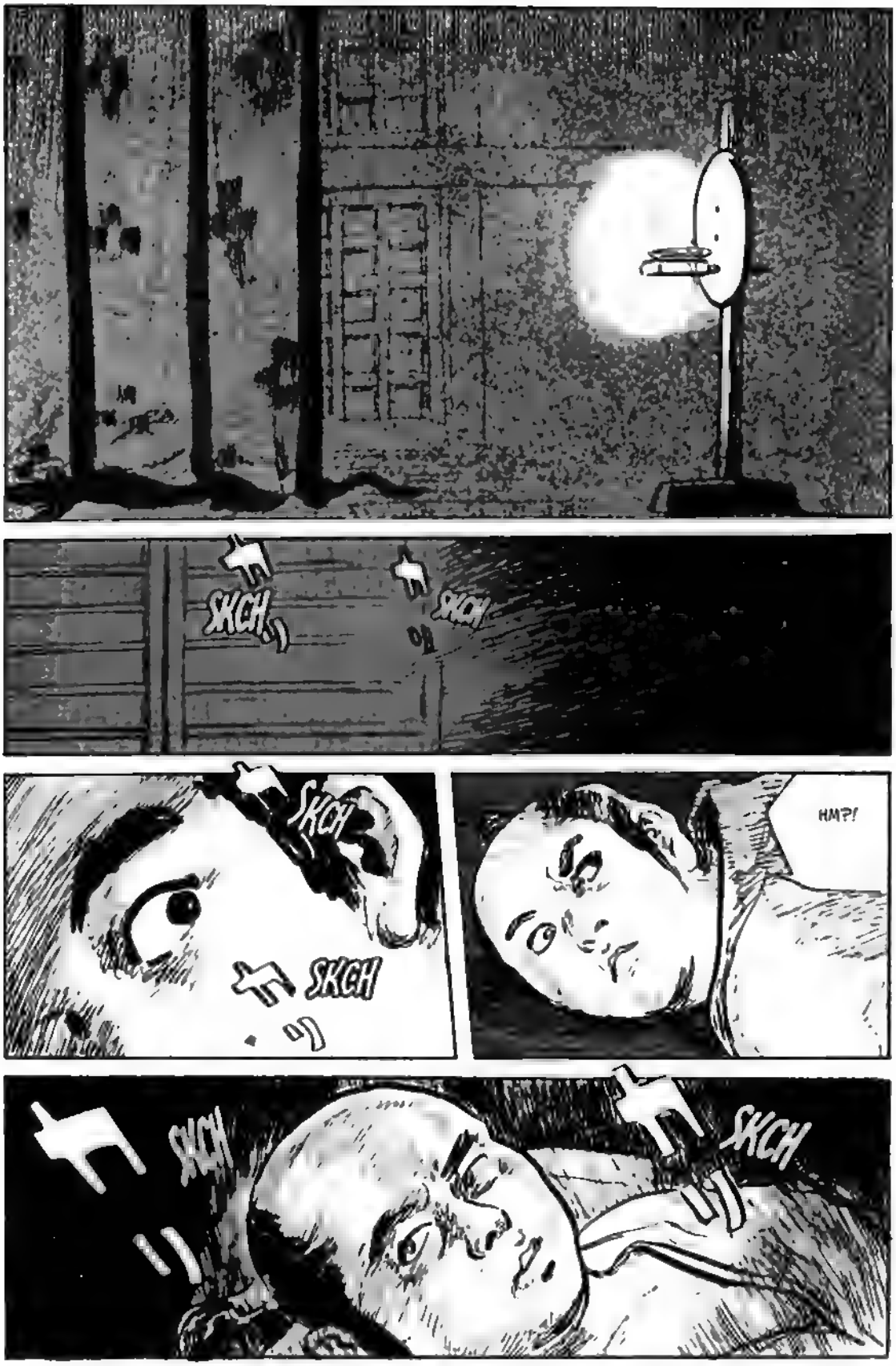

DAMMIT! HOW LONG IS HE GOING TO MAKE ME WAIT?!
ふぁ
ふぁ
ふぁ




Y--
YOU'RE...
STILL
AWAKE?


UH...
UH...


UMMM...
UMM. .

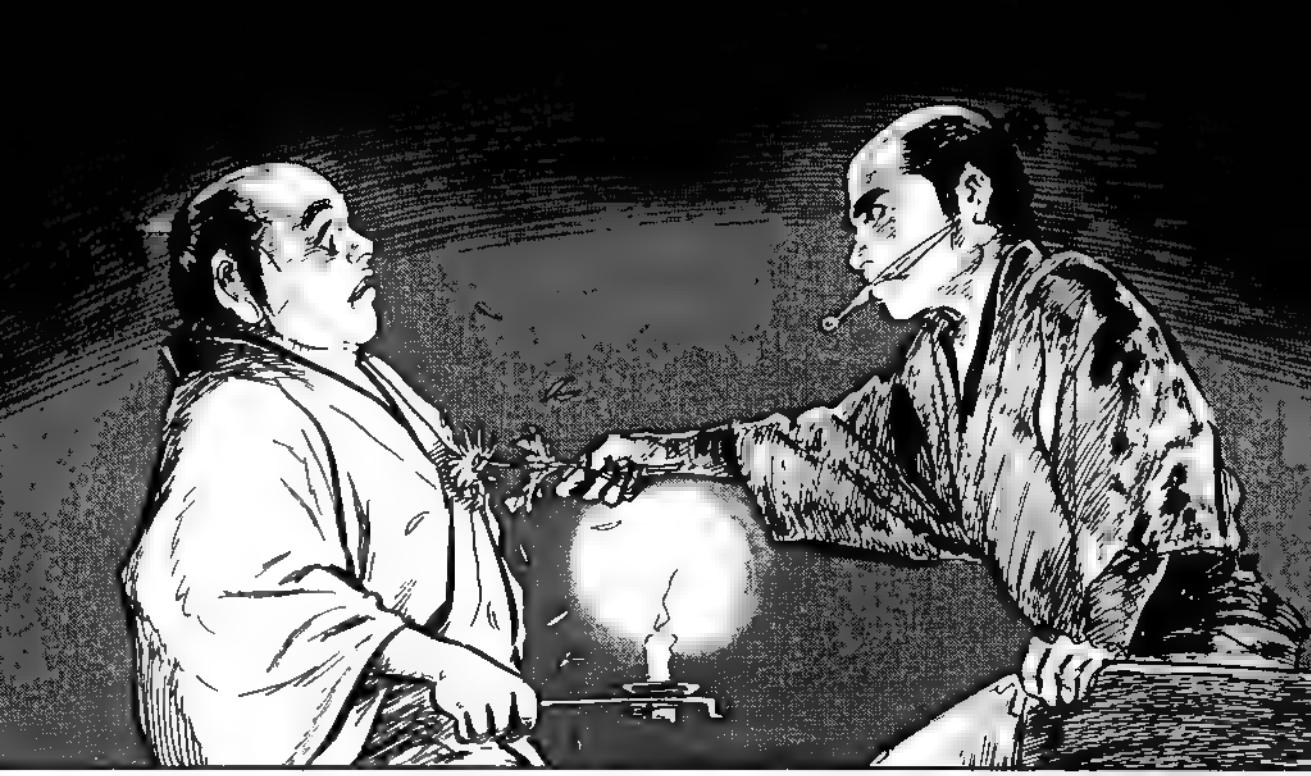

SKCH
SKCH
SKCH
SKCH
HM?!
SKCH
SKCH

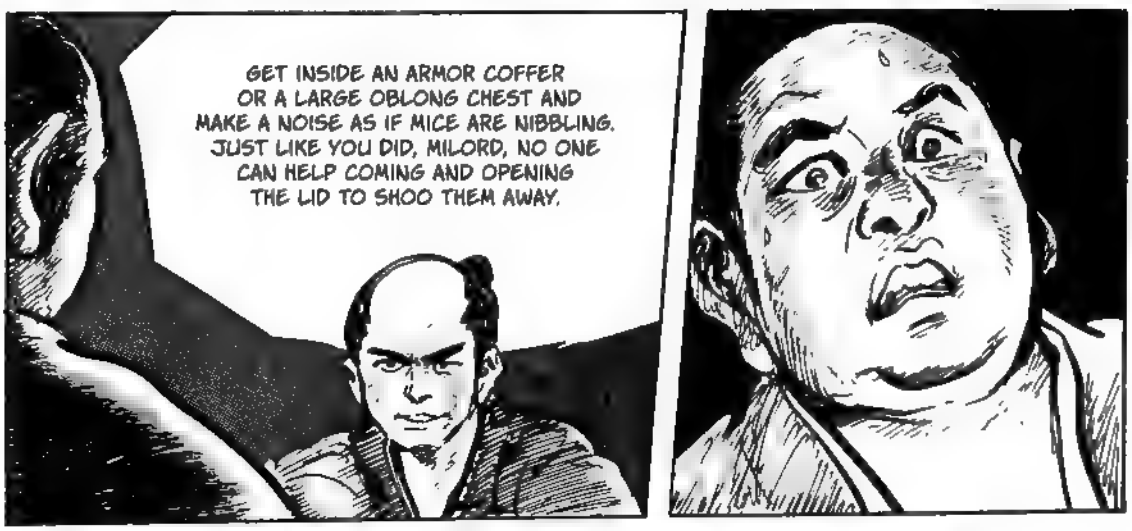

SKCH
SKRICH
MICE, I THINK.
SKCH
WHAT'S... THAT SOUND?


SKCH
SKCH
SKCH
SKRGHLOO
STOP IT.




MICE MUST'VE GOTTEN IN FROM THERE.
CRAP. THEY'RE NIBBLING ON MY ARMOR.
SHOO. SHOO.
I BET SHE LOOKED AT IT AND DIDN'T CLOSE THE LID PROPERLY.
WHOA!




GET INSIDE AN ARMOR COFFER OR A LARGE OBLONG CHEST AND MAKE A NOISE AS IF MICE ARE NIBBLING. JUST LIKE YOU DID, MILORD, NO ONE CAN HELP COMING AND OPENING THE LID TO SHOO THEM AWAY.


IT'S CALLED THE *JISATSU* TECHNIQUE.
LURING AND KILLING.


COMPLETELY DEFENSELESS.
AN EASY KILL.


MILORD, WHENEVER SOMEONE UPSETS YOU, PLEASE TELL ME HIS NAME.
AND PRETEND THAT I TOOK HIM DOWN USING THE JISATSU TECHNIQUE.
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
PRETEND THEY'RE DEAD, HUH? HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.
I THINK IT WILL HELP YOU FEEL BETTER.
PRETENDING THEY'RE GONE.
IT'S NOTHING BUT PRETENDING.
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I HAD IN MIND.



# Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

## No. 6: Kite Katō





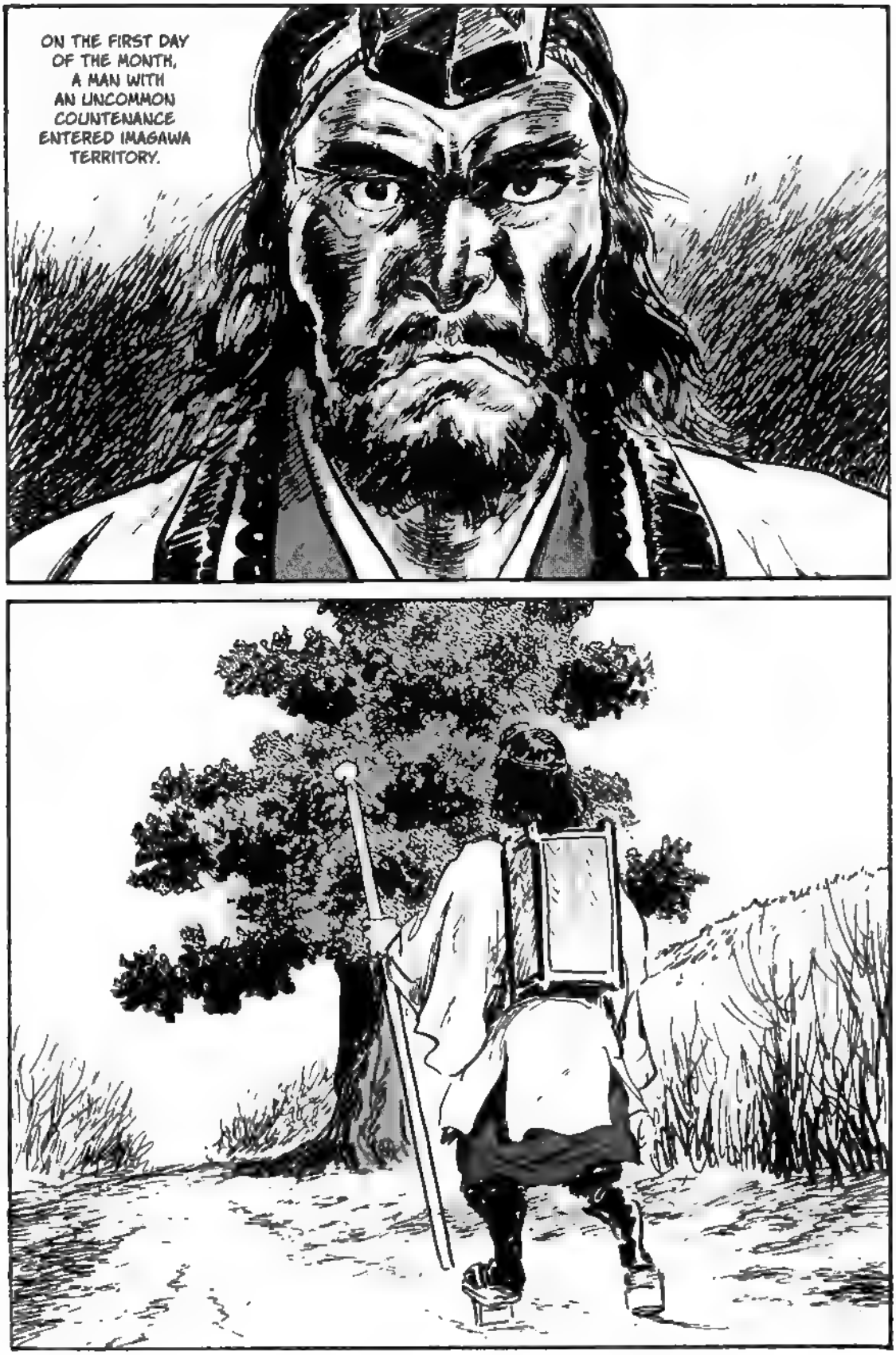










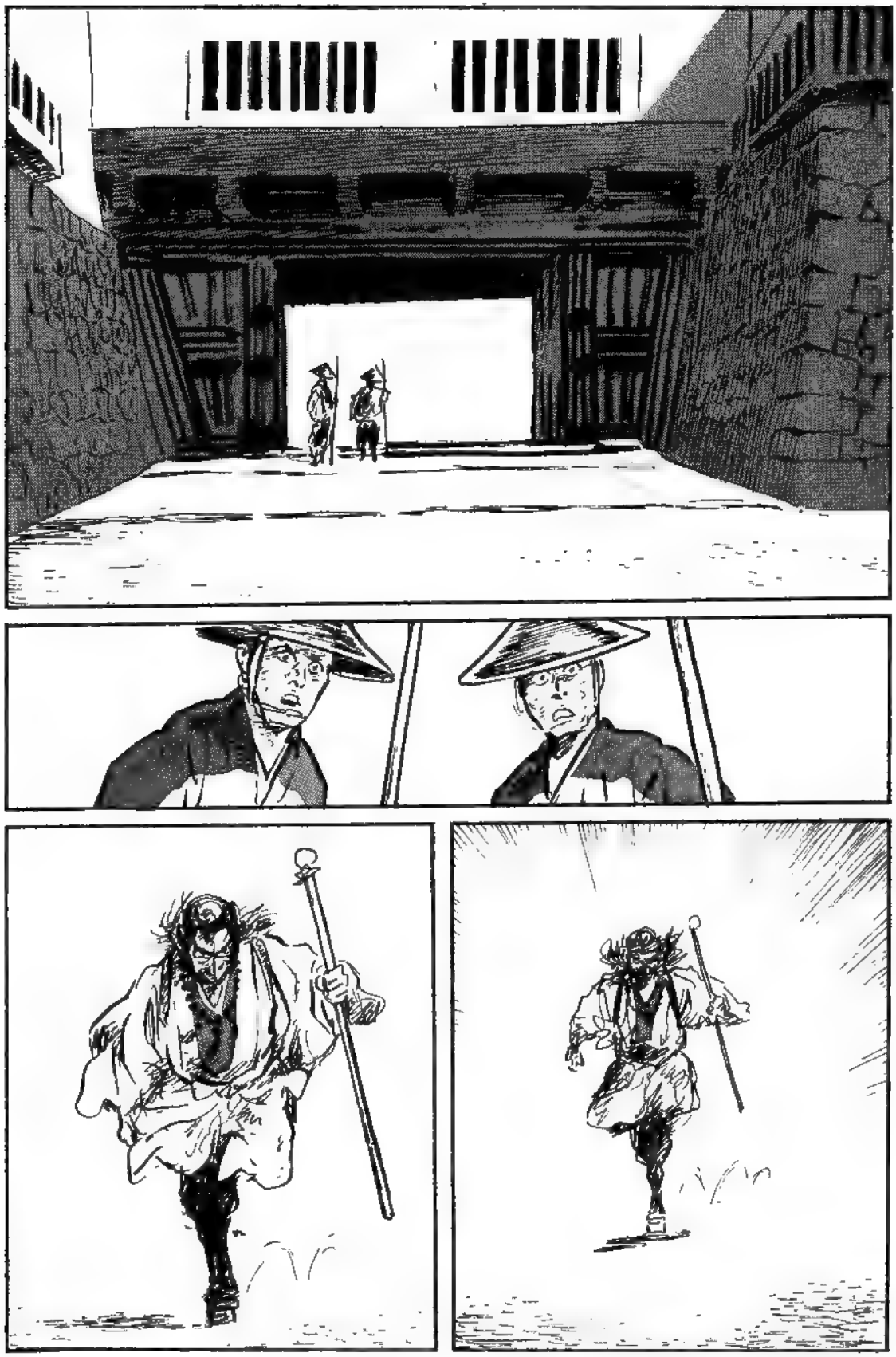

ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE MONTH, A MAN WITH AN UNCOMMON COUNTENANCE ENTERED IMAGAWA TERRITORY.


IT'S GOOD TO BE A MOUNTAIN. IT CAN SIT STILL WITHOUT FOOD.
HOW HARD IT IS TO EAT SOMETHING.
MAN CANNOT GO WITHOUT EATING. THAT'S WHY THE STRUGGLE NEVER ENDS.


EMPEROR'S DEATH, FAMINE, THE GREAT WIND AND ALL, THERE'S NO BUSINESS OUT THERE IN THE CAPITAL.
I HEARD HE WAS CREMATED ON THE SEVENTY-FIFTH DAY.

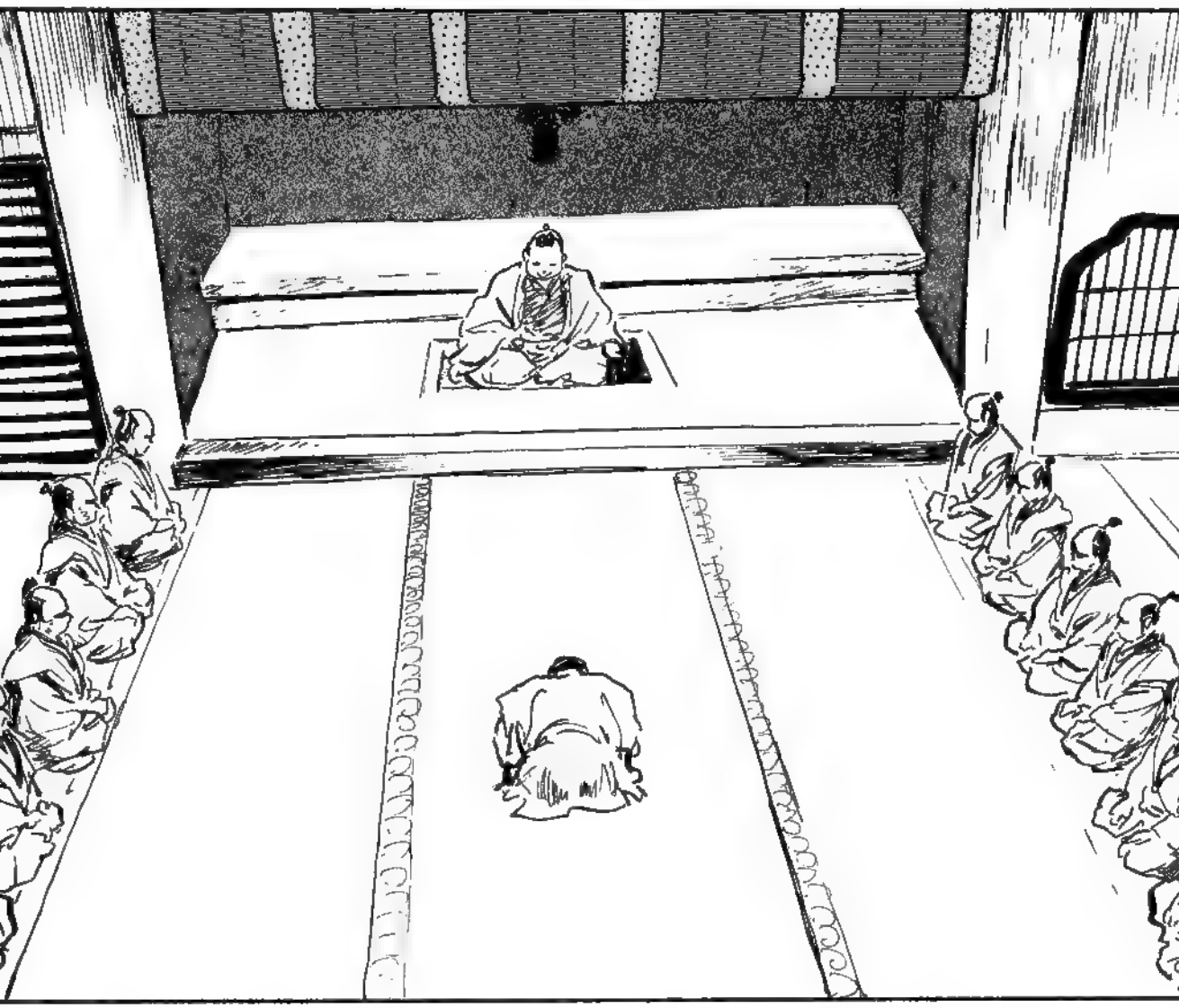

IN SEPTEMBER, EMPEROR GO-NARA DIED. HE WAS SIXTY-TWO YEARS OLD. HE WAS CREMATED SEVENTY-FIVE DAYS AFTER HIS DEATH.
BESIDES, I HEAR SMALLPOX IS SPREADING RAPIDLY
SNAPP

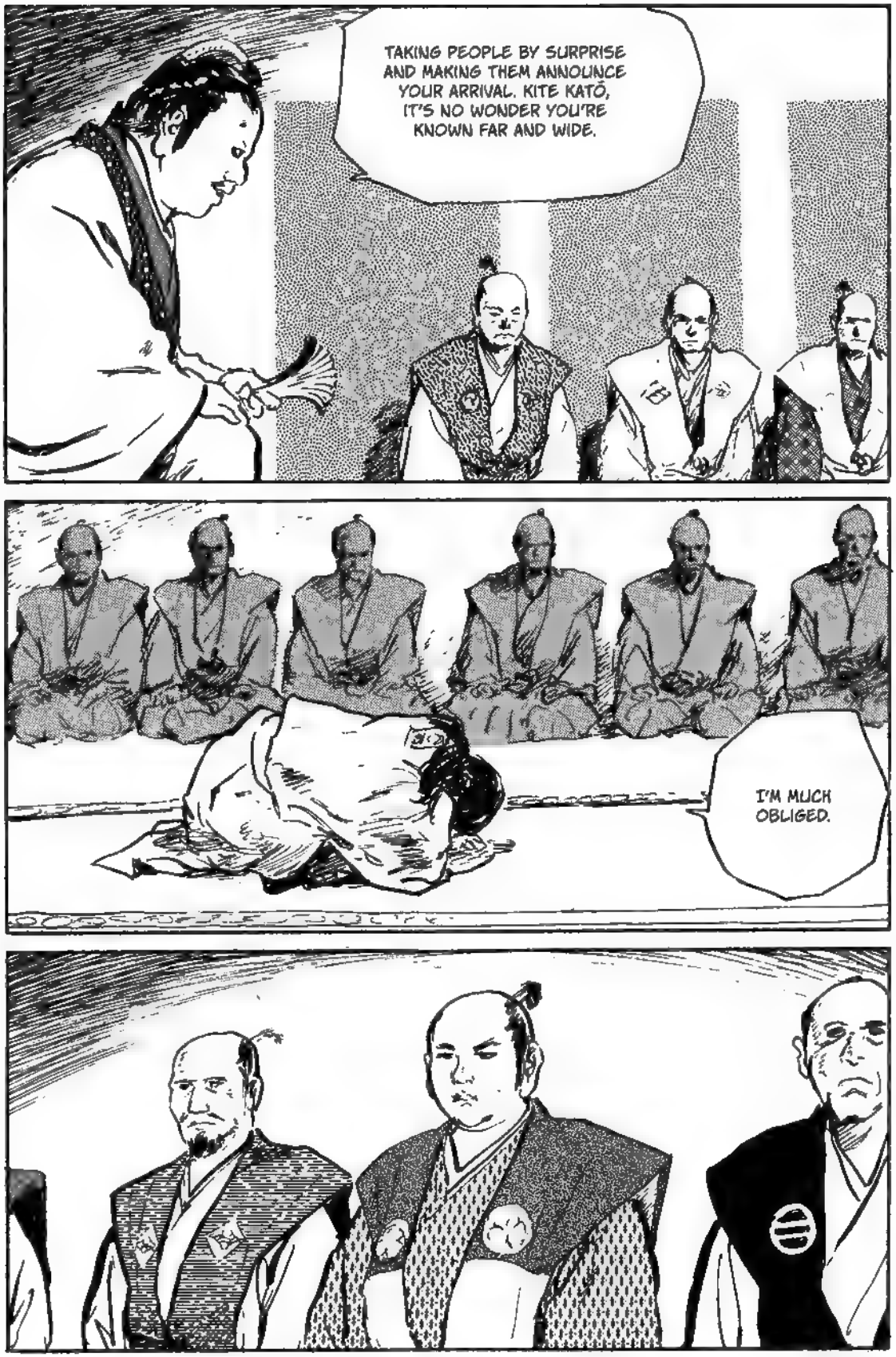

I'M STARVING.




BUWA
JUN
I WOULD LIKE AN AUDIENCE WITH YOSHIMOTO-KŌ, THE VICEROY OF SURUGA.
GULP
NOW KINDLY ANNOUNCE MY ARRIVAL.
I AM KATO DANZŌ. SUWA YORISHIGE-*DONO* USED TO RECEIVE ME AS HIS GUEST WHEN HE WAS STILL ALIVE.


HO
HO
HO
HO
OH
HO
HO
HO




TAKING PEOPLE BY SURPRISE AND MAKING THEM ANNOUNCE YOUR ARRIVAL. KITE KATŌ, IT'S NO WONDER YOU'RE KNOWN FAR AND WIDE.
I'M MUCH OBLIGED.


I ALSO WISH TO FULFILL SUWA YORISHIGE-DONO'S REVENGE...
IT IS THE SEVENTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF NOBUTORA'S DEATH, AND I WISH TO GIVE A PRAYER IN HONOR OF HIS MEMORY.
AND NOW, WHAT DO YOU WANT?
WHAAT?!
THUS, I'VE COME TO RECEIVE YOUR PERMISSION.
...BY STRIKING YAMAMOTO KANSUKE, THE WAR STRATEGIST OF TAKEDA, AS WELL AS HIS MASTER, HARUNOBU.

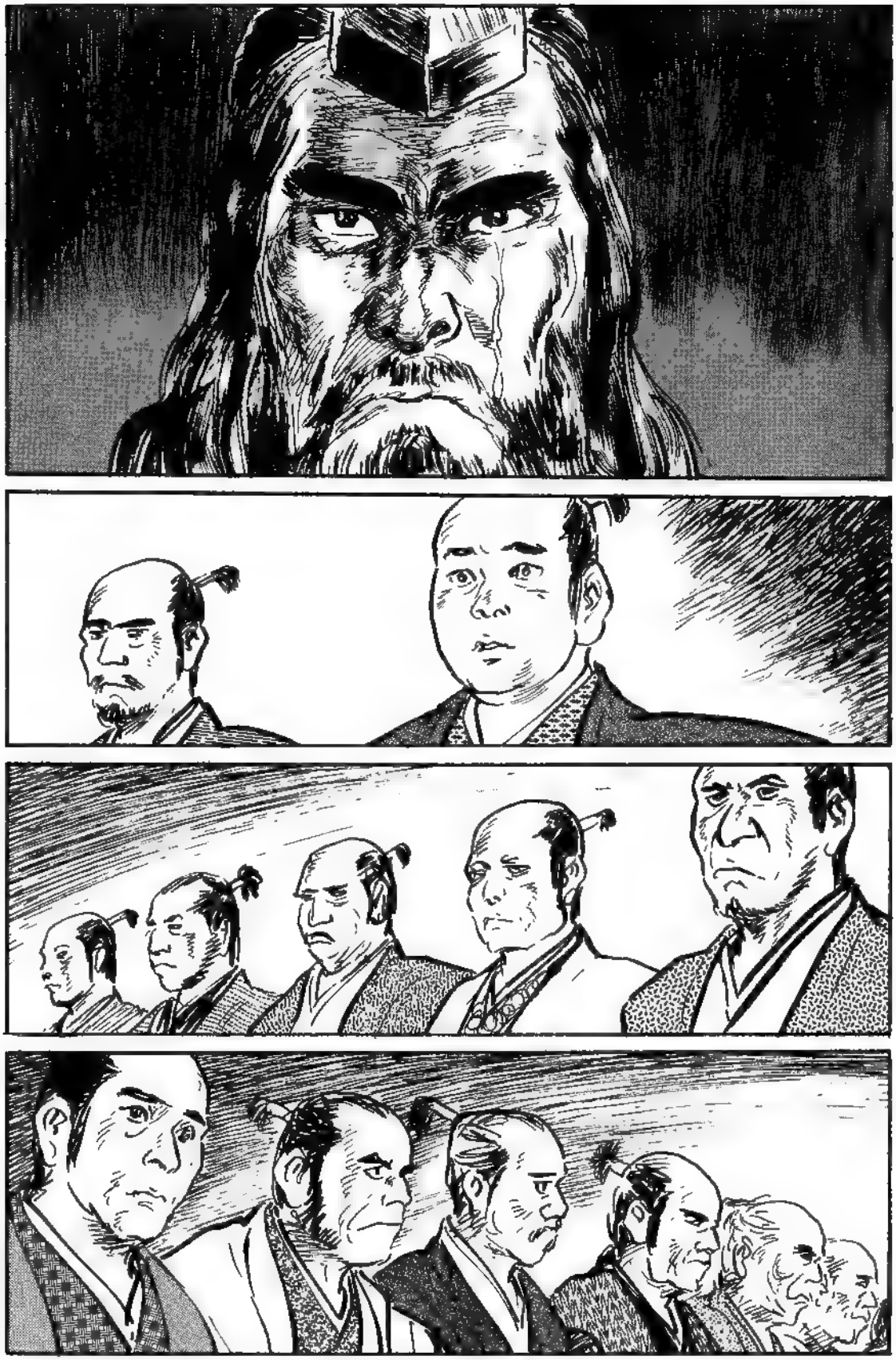

IN *TENBUN* YEAR TEN, HARUNOBU EXILED HIS OWN FATHER, NOBUTORA-*SAMA*, TO IMAGAWA TERRITORY. AND THEREAFTER, HE NOT ONLY USURPED THE *SHUGO*'S POST, BUT ALSO INVITED SUWA YORISHIGE-*DONO* TO THE MANSION IN KOFUCHU...

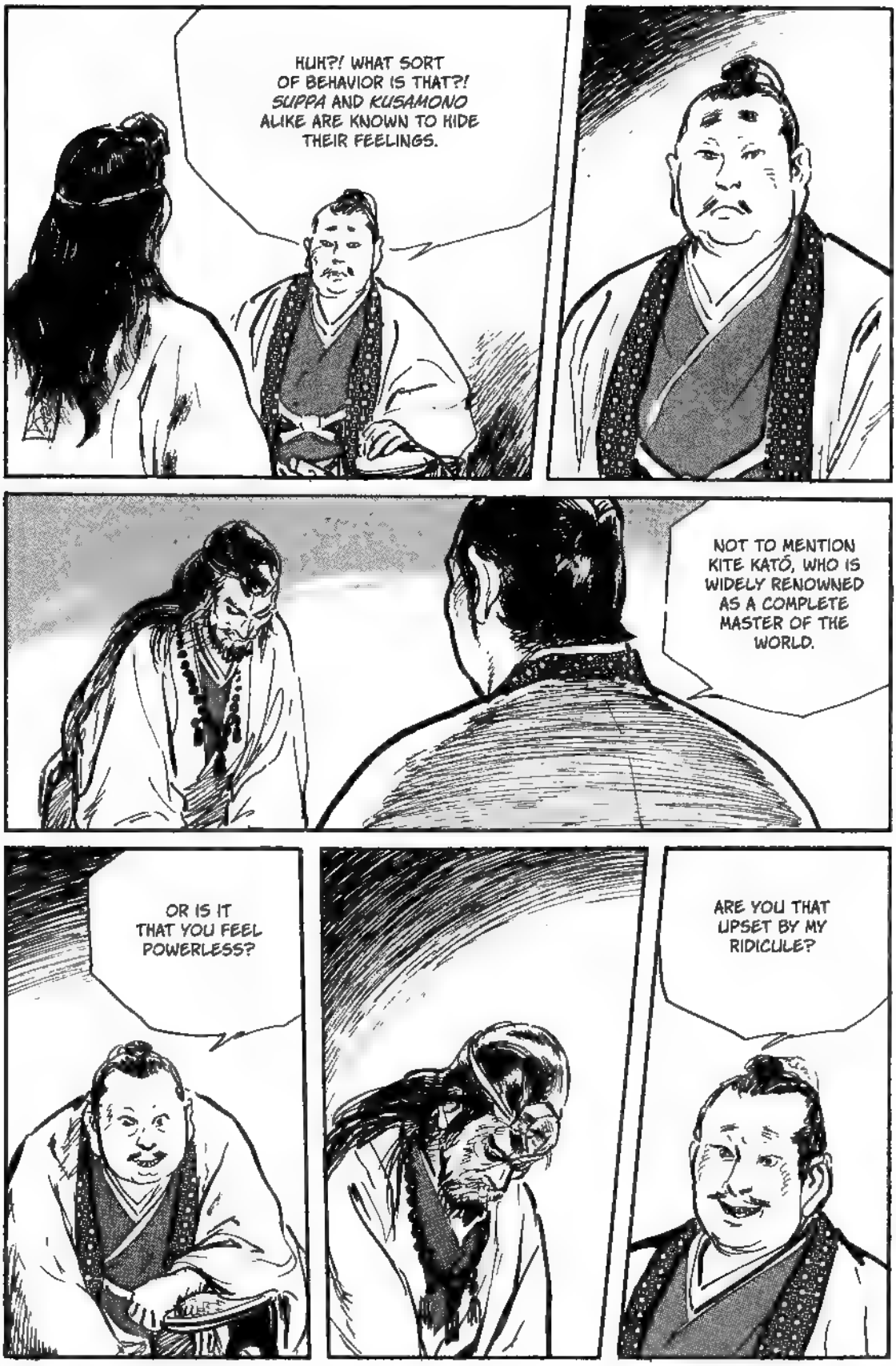

I THOUGHT OF TAKING VENGEANCE IMMEDIATELY, BUT THE TIME WASN'T RIGHT. SO I LAY LOW, SHARPENING MY FANGS FOR SEVENTEEN YEARS.
...ONLY TO HAVE HIM KILLED, ENDING SUWA. IT'S AN UNFORGIVABLE DEED, WHICH NO GOD WOULD PARDON.


NOW THAT IT'S THE SEVENTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF NOBUTORA-SAMA'S DEATH, I BELIEVE THE TIME HAS FINALLY COME...


...BUT NOBUTORA IS STILL ALIVE AS A WANDERING MONK, PRAYING TO FIND PEACE IN HIS NEXT LIFE.
HOLD ON. YOU KEEP SAYING IT'S THE SEVENTEENTH ANNIVERSARY...
A SAMURAI WARRIOR WHO LOST HIS TERRITORY, ARMY, AND HORSES IS AS GOOD AS DEAD. NOBUTORA-*SAMA* CERTAINLY BREATHED HIS LAST ON THIS DAY OF THIS MONTH, SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO.
...I THANK YOU WHOLE-HEARTEDLY.
YOSHIMOTO-KŌ, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS CONDUCT IN TAKING HIM IN AND CARING FOR HIM...
NOBUTORA-SAMA HAS BEEN A LIVING CORPSE EVER SINCE.


HO HO HO HO HO.
YOU SAY YOU'LL ATTACK HARUNOBU AND KANSUKE. DO YOU REALLY MEAN IT?
HO HO HO HO HO.
ENOUGH OF YOUR CONCEIT!
ALL YOU HAVE IS A TECHNIQUE TO TRICK PEOPLE. HO HO HO HO HO HO HO.




HUH?! WHAT SORT OF BEHAVIOR IS THAT?! *SUPPA* AND *KUSAMONO* ALIKE ARE KNOWN TO HIDE THEIR FEELINGS.
NOT TO MENTION KITE KATŌ, WHO IS WIDELY RENOWNED AS A COMPLETE MASTER OF THE WORLD.
OR IS IT THAT YOU FEEL POWERLESS?
ARE YOU THAT UPSET BY MY RIDICULE?


TELL ME, DANZŌ! WHAT'S THAT TEAR FOR?

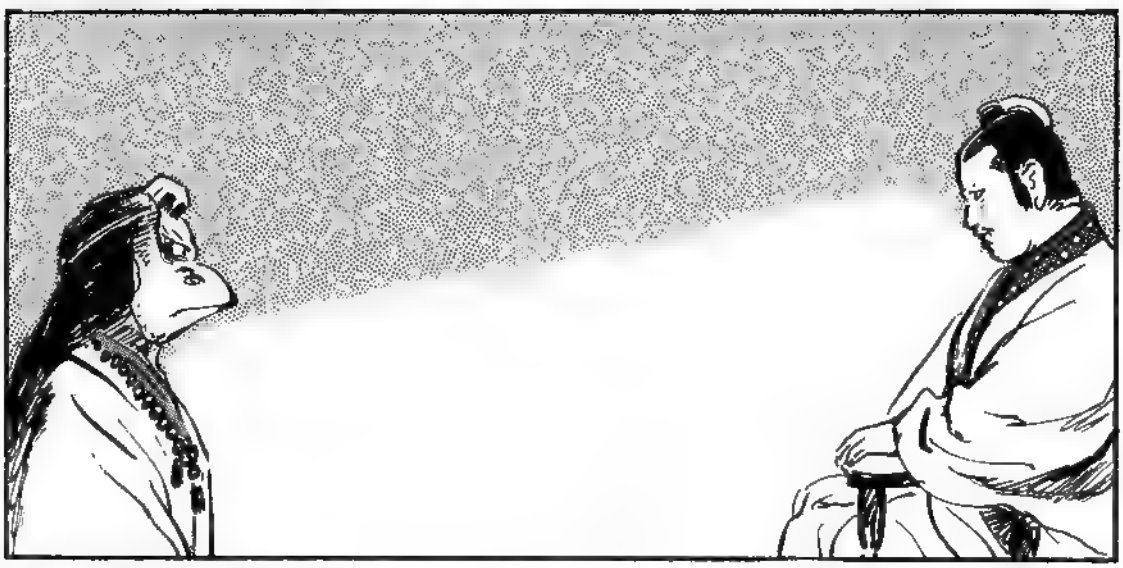

I PUT ON THE MASK SO THAT I MAY IMPART THE TRUTH.
WHAT INSOLENCE! WHAT FOLLY IS THIS?!
IN OTHER WORDS, A MAN'S FACE SHOWS THE FULL GAMUT OF HIS EMOTIONS.
A MAN'S EXPRESSION REVEALS HIS THOUGHTS, BECAUSE HIS FACE MIRRORS HIS HEART.


MILORD, YOU SAID *SUPPA* DO NOT SHOW THEIR FEELINGS.
THAT'S A MISCONCEPTION. *SUPPA* EXPRESS EMOTIONS MUCH MORE THAN THE OTHERS -- EXCEPT THAT WE DON'T DO IT THE SAME WAY.
WE RAGE WHEN OTHERS WOULD BE HAPPY. WE LAUGH WHEN OTHERS WOULD BE SAD. WE MAKE OUR FACE APPEAR THE WAY WE CHOOSE AT ANY TIME.
THAT'S WHY WE'RE *SUPPA*.
WE DON'T REVEAL OUR THOUGHTS THROUGH OUR FACES. INSTEAD, WE FAKE OUR EXPRESSIONS.
TH-- THEN... YOUR TEARS.


HM?
MILORD, YOU NAILED IT PERFECTLY.
"WHAT'S THAT TEAR FOR," YOU ASKED.
KMPH...
IT'S FAKE-- A FAKE TEAR CONTROLLED AT WILL.
YOU COULD NOT TELL PRECISELY BECAUSE IT'S SUPPA'S TEAR.


IN RESPONSE TO YOSHIMOTO'S RIDICULE, IF DANZŌ HAD ARGUED HOTLY OR TRIED TO EXPLAIN HIS POSITION ELOQUENTLY...
"A COMPLETE MASTER..." ASTONISHED, IEYASU WAS SPEECHLESS.
...HE WOULD HAVE PROVOKED NOTHING BUT ANTIPATHY. COOLLY EVADING DERISION WITH A SIMPLE TEAR, PUTTING ON THE MASK OF *TENGU* AND EXPLAINING WHAT THE TEAR REPRESENTED, HE CHARMED YOSHIMOTO INSTEAD.


EVEN IEYASU, WHO THOUGHT HE SAW THROUGH THE MAN, COULD NOT HELP BEING CAPTIVATED.
A BRILLIANT MIND-READER AND CONVERSATIONALIST... NO WONDER HE IS KNOWN AS A COMPLETE MASTER OF THE WORLD...




HMPH.

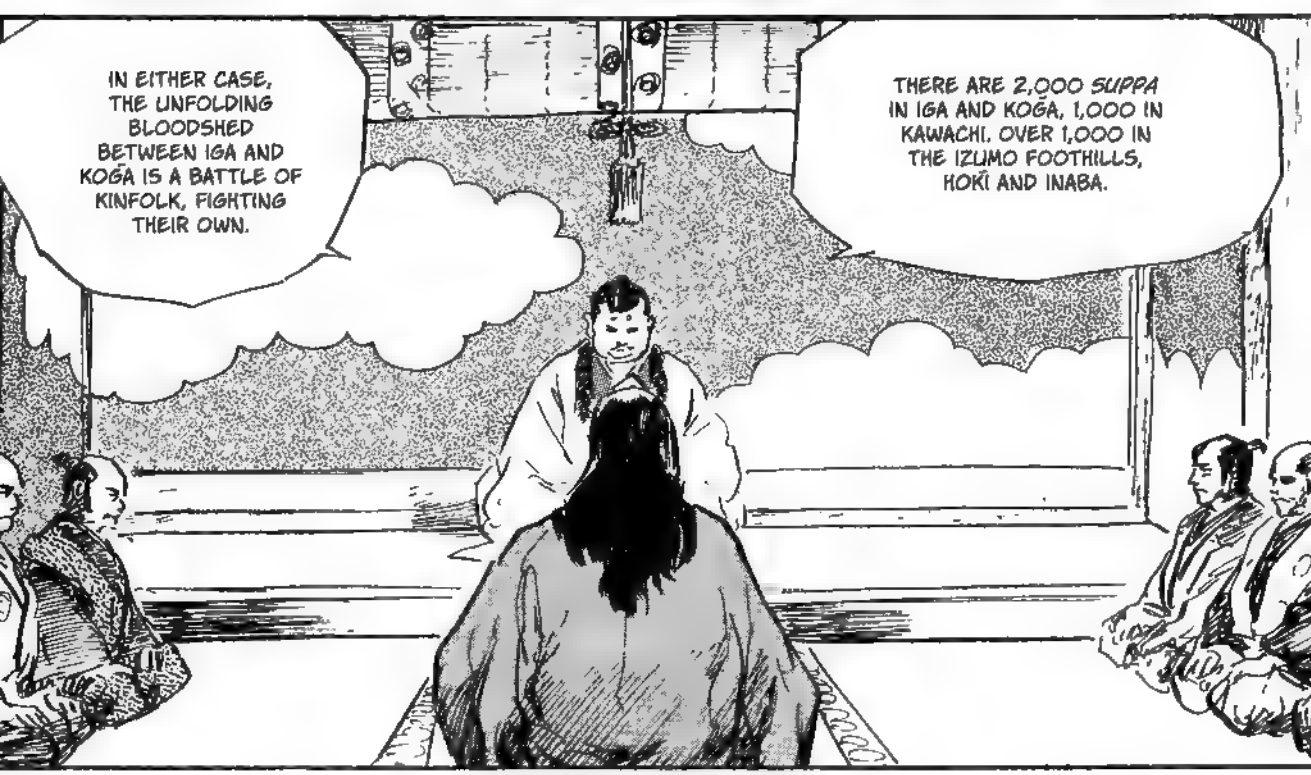

THUS, BY PUTTING ON THE MASK, I CAN IMPART MY TRUE HEART TO YOU.
PLEASE BE AWARE THAT AN EXCELLENT *SUPPA* HAS NO FACE THAT WOULD REVEAL HIS FEELINGS.

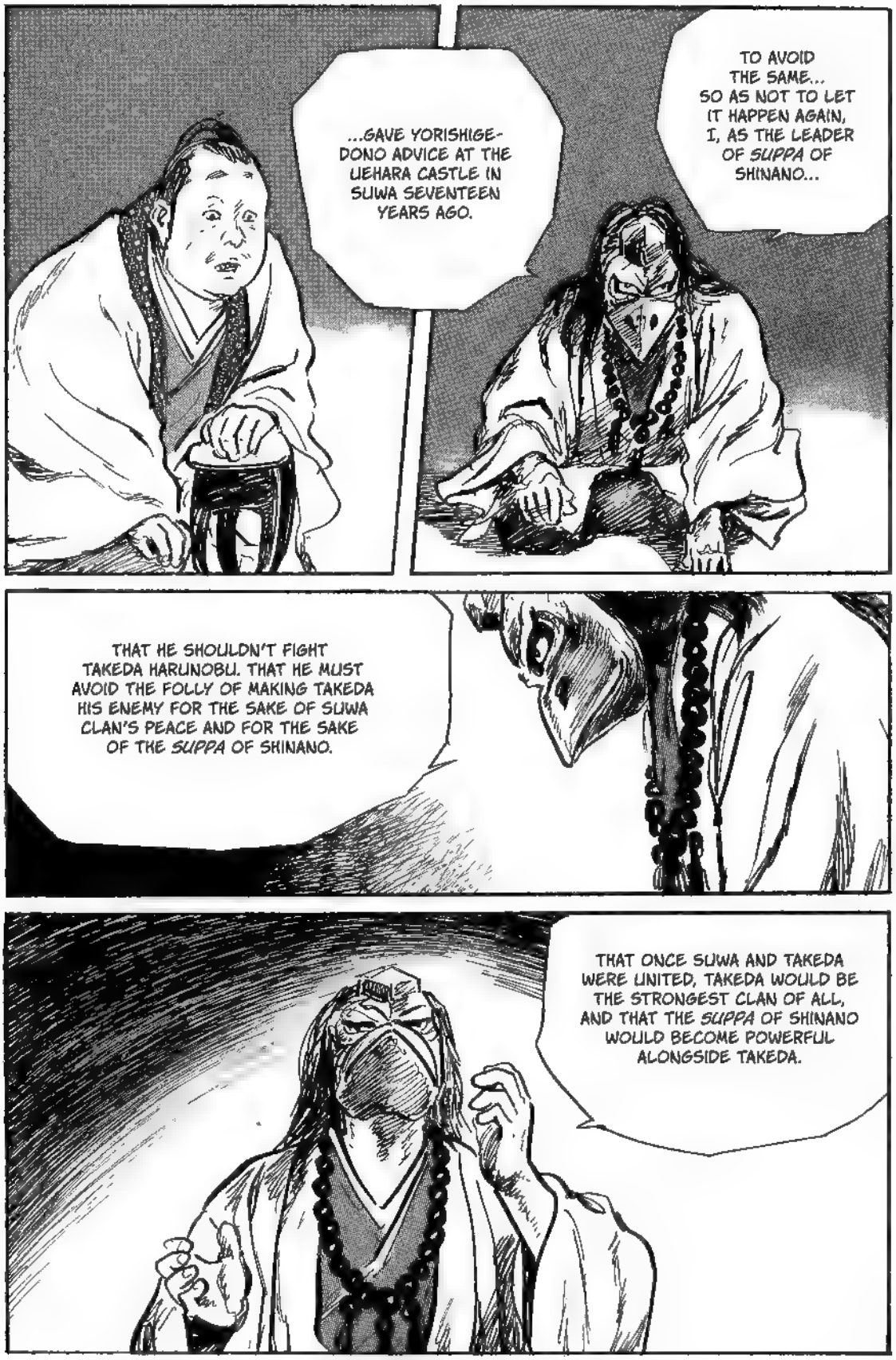

CLANS THAT I, KATŌ, RULE IN SUWA ARE THE MORIYA DARUMA CLAN IN THE SOUTH OF LAKE SUWA FROM TSUETSUKI PASS THROUGH KANAZAWA PASS.
THE ANCESTOR OF *SUPPA* FROM SHINANO IS TOBIHŌSHI OF MT. TOGAKUSHI, AND THE LEADING *SUPPA* BORE THE NAME OF KATŌ FOR GENERATIONS.
THE YAMABE UMONDAYŪ CLAN AND NAKABE KANZAEMON CLAN IN THE EAST OF THE LAKE.
THE SUWA SANSA CLAN IN THE WEST OF THE LAKE FROM ONO PASS, KATSUTSURU PASS THROUGH SHIOJIRI PASS.


IN ADDITION, THERE IS THE MOCHIZUKI CLAN IN MOCHIZUKI AND THE SANADA CLAN IN SANADA.
Y-- YOU CONTROL... ALL 3,000?
THERE ARE NO LESS THAN 3,000 MEN IN TOTAL.
HMPH.
INDEED.

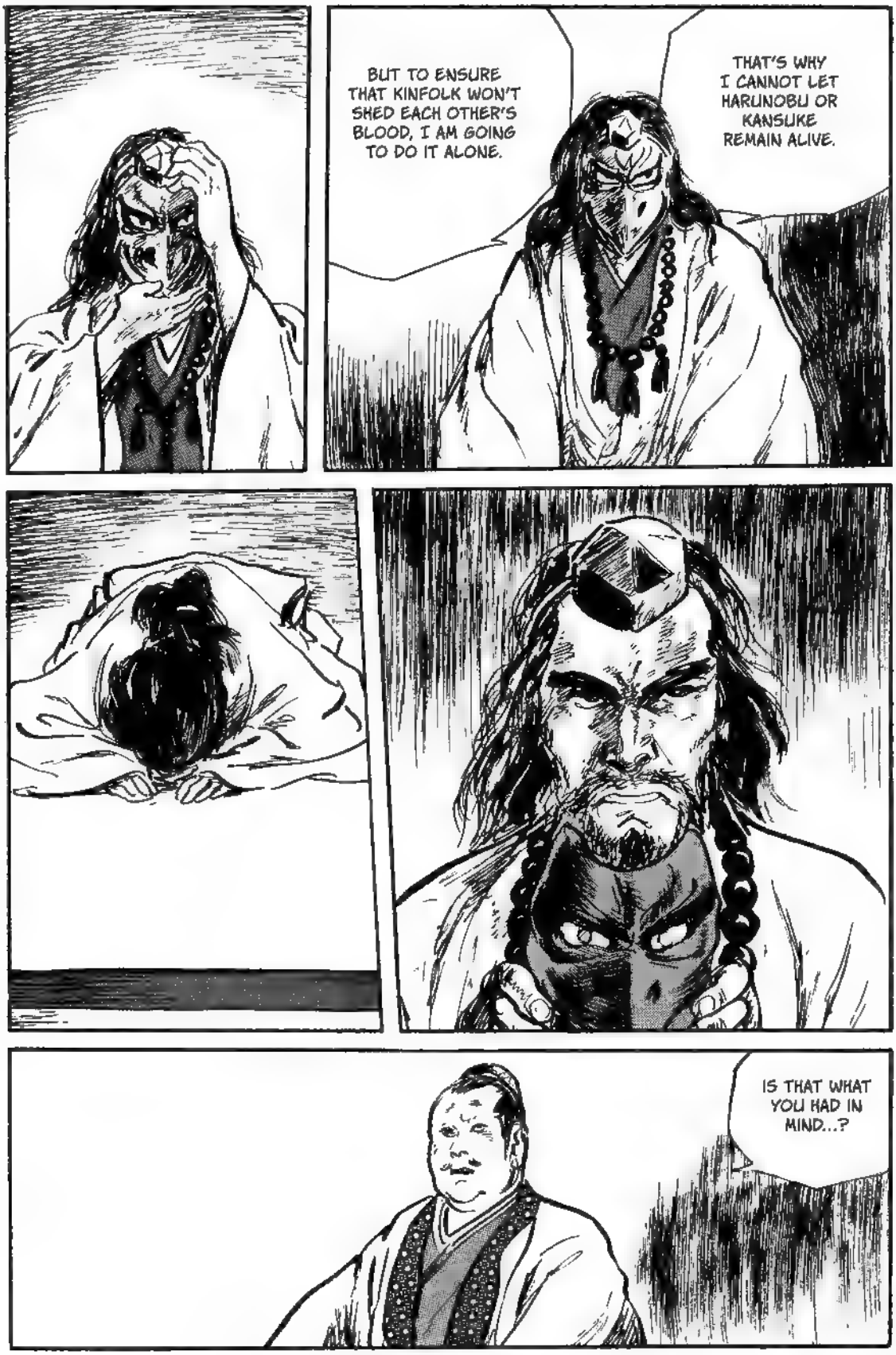

MOST OF THESE *SUPPA* IN SHINANO BELONG TO EITHER TAKEDA, SANADA, OR SUWA. THAT'S HOW THEY MAKE THEIR LIVING.


IT'S AS CERTAIN AS DEATH THAT THE FIGHT WOULD'VE BROUGHT CARNAGE, WITH KINFOLK SLAUGHTERING THEIR OWN FLESH AND BLOOD.
IF TAKEDA, SANADA, AND SUWA FOUGHT, WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED?


IN EITHER CASE, THE UNFOLDING BLOODSHED BETWEEN IGA AND KOGA IS A BATTLE OF KINFOLK, FIGHTING THEIR OWN.
THERE ARE 2,000 *SUPPA* IN IGA AND KOGA, 1,000 IN KAWACHI, OVER 1,000 IN THE IZUMO FOOTHILLS, HOKI AND INABA.


...GAVE YORISHIGE-DONO ADVICE AT THE UEHARA CASTLE IN SUWA SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO.
TO AVOID THE SAME... SO AS NOT TO LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN, I, AS THE LEADER OF *SUPPA* OF SHINANO...
THAT HE SHOULDN'T FIGHT TAKEDA HARUNOBU. THAT HE MUST AVOID THE FOLLY OF MAKING TAKEDA HIS ENEMY FOR THE SAKE OF SUWA CLAN'S PEACE AND FOR THE SAKE OF THE *SUPPA* OF SHINANO.
THAT ONCE SUWA AND TAKEDA WERE UNITED, TAKEDA WOULD BE THE STRONGEST CLAN OF ALL, AND THAT THE *SUPPA* OF SHINANO WOULD BECOME POWERFUL ALONGSIDE TAKEDA.


...SENT HIM TO HIS DEATH!
DESPITE OUR SECRET AGREEMENT AND DESPITE THE FACT YORISHIGE-DONO LISTENED TO MY WORDS AND VISITED KOFUCHU TO BRING PEACE, YAMAMOTO KANSUKE...
I THUS ADVISED HIM ONLY BECAUSE I HAD A SECRET AGREEMENT WITH YAMAMOTO KANSUKE, THE WAR STRATEGIST OF TAKEDA.
HOW CAN I IGNORE THIS BETRAYAL?!


BUT TO ENSURE THAT KINFOLK WON'T SHED EACH OTHER'S BLOOD, I AM GOING TO DO IT ALONE.
THAT'S WHY I CANNOT LET HARUNOBU OR KANSUKE REMAIN ALIVE.
IS THAT WHAT YOU HAD IN MIND...?

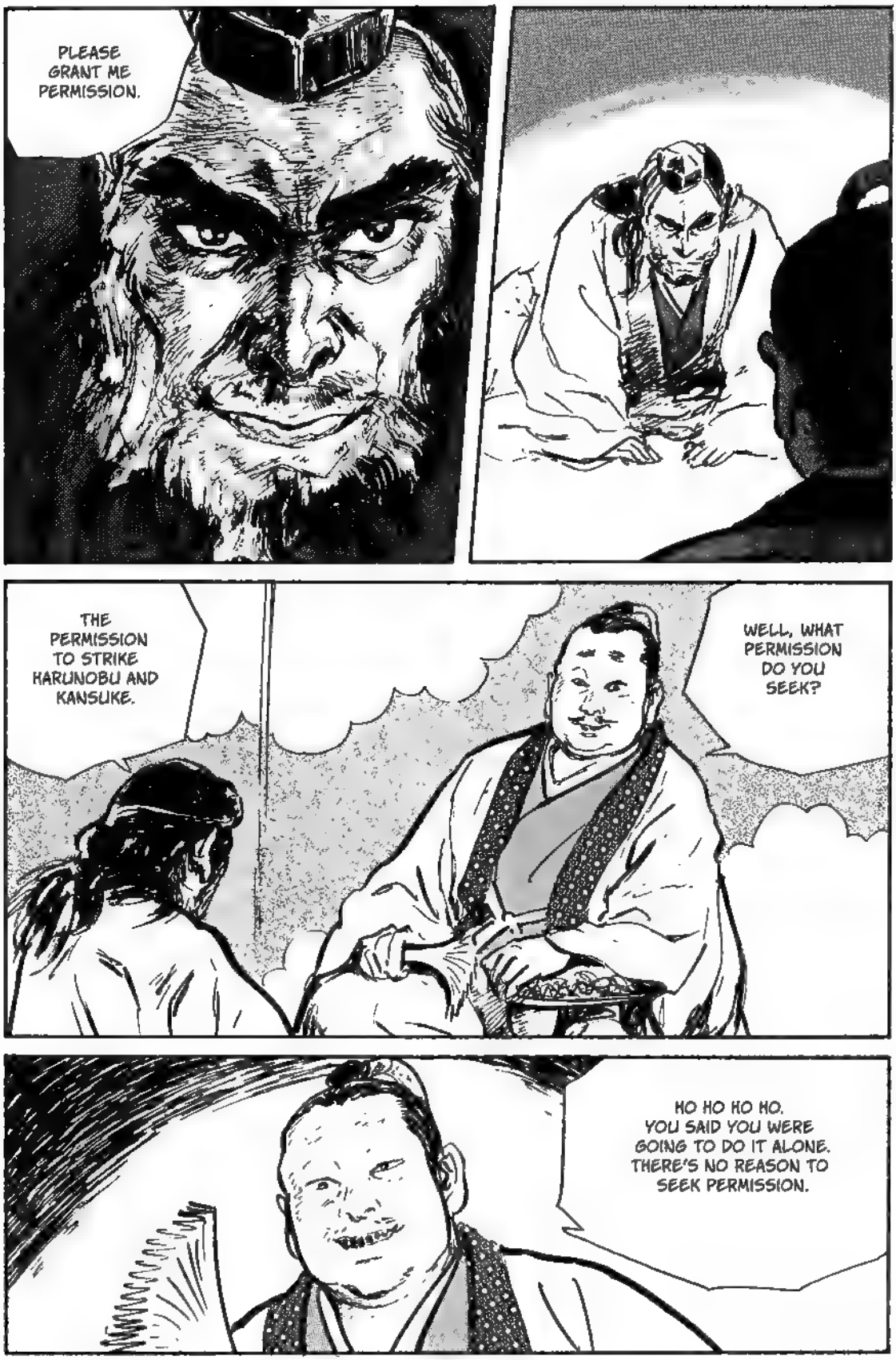

THEY WERE BOTH SUPPA AFTER ALL
IEYASU COULD NOT HELP BUT COMPARE HANZŌ WITH THIS MAN WHO COULD FAKE HIS EXPRESSIONS AT WILL
DOES HANZŌ LAUGH WHEN OTHERS WOULD CRY, AND CRY WHEN OTHERS WOULD BE ANGRY? CAN HE ACT SO WELL?
BEGINNING TO FEEL NERVOUS IEYASU RESOLVED TO VERIFY IT
I WONDER IF HE EVER LIES WITH HIS FACE TO ME, TOO?



# Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

## No. 7: Who Is He In The Rain




PLEASE GRANT ME PERMISSION.
THE PERMISSION TO STRIKE HARUNOBU AND KANSUKE.
WELL, WHAT PERMISSION DO YOU SEEK?
HO HO HO HO. YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO DO IT ALONE. THERE'S NO REASON TO SEEK PERMISSION.


FURTHERMORE, TO HIRE A MERE *SUPPA* TO HIT THEM WOULD BLEMISH IMAGAWA'S NAME.
BESIDES, IF I GRANT PERMISSION THOUGHTLESSLY, CHANCES ARE YOU'LL SHOUT IT EVERYWHERE THAT YOU'VE DONE IT UNDER IMAGAWA'S ORDERS.
YOU CANNOT PLAY THAT TRICK ON ME. HO HO HO HO.
HO HO HO HO.
I PLAN ON GOING UP TO THE CAPITAL AND RULING THE ENTIRE NATION SOONER OR LATER. THEREFORE, I MUST BE MINDFUL OF WHAT THE POPULACE THINKS OF ME.
WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, MILORD, THE POPULACE WILL SPREAD RUMOR THAT I'M ACTING UNDER YOUR ORDERS.
*SUPPA* AROUND THE COUNTRY MUST'VE HEARD BY NOW THAT I ENTERED IMAGAWA TERRITORY.


NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE I'D STRIKE KANSUKE AND HARUNOBU ALONE.


YOU'VE ALREADY ALLOWED ME YOUR AUDIENCE.
THAT'S WHY I'M REQUESTING YOUR PERMISSION.


WHAT?!
NARROW. HOW NARROW.
AND YOU'VE HEARD MY TRUE INTENTIONS. AT THIS POINT, YOU CANNOT PRETEND IGNORANCE.


I AM SAYING YOU'RE NARROW-MINDED.
TAP


SILENCE!
WHAT INSOLENCE!




MILORD, THERE'S ONLY ONE ANSWER YOU CAN GIVE. GRANT ME YOUR PERMISSION.
FOR YOU, MILORD, ASPIRING TO RULE THE COUNTRY, TAKEDA MUST BE AN EYESORE.
YOU CANNOT PRETEND INNOCENCE.
...ORDER THEM TO KILL ME!
IF YOU CANNOT DO SO...


KILL HIM!
WHAT CAN YOU ACHIEVE WHEN YOU'RE MINDFUL OF WHAT THE POPULACE THINKS? THAT'S WHY I SAID YOU'RE NARROW-MINDED
おのれ
ぬかせ!!


PA.
FOOF






WAR IS
WHOLESALE
MURDER.

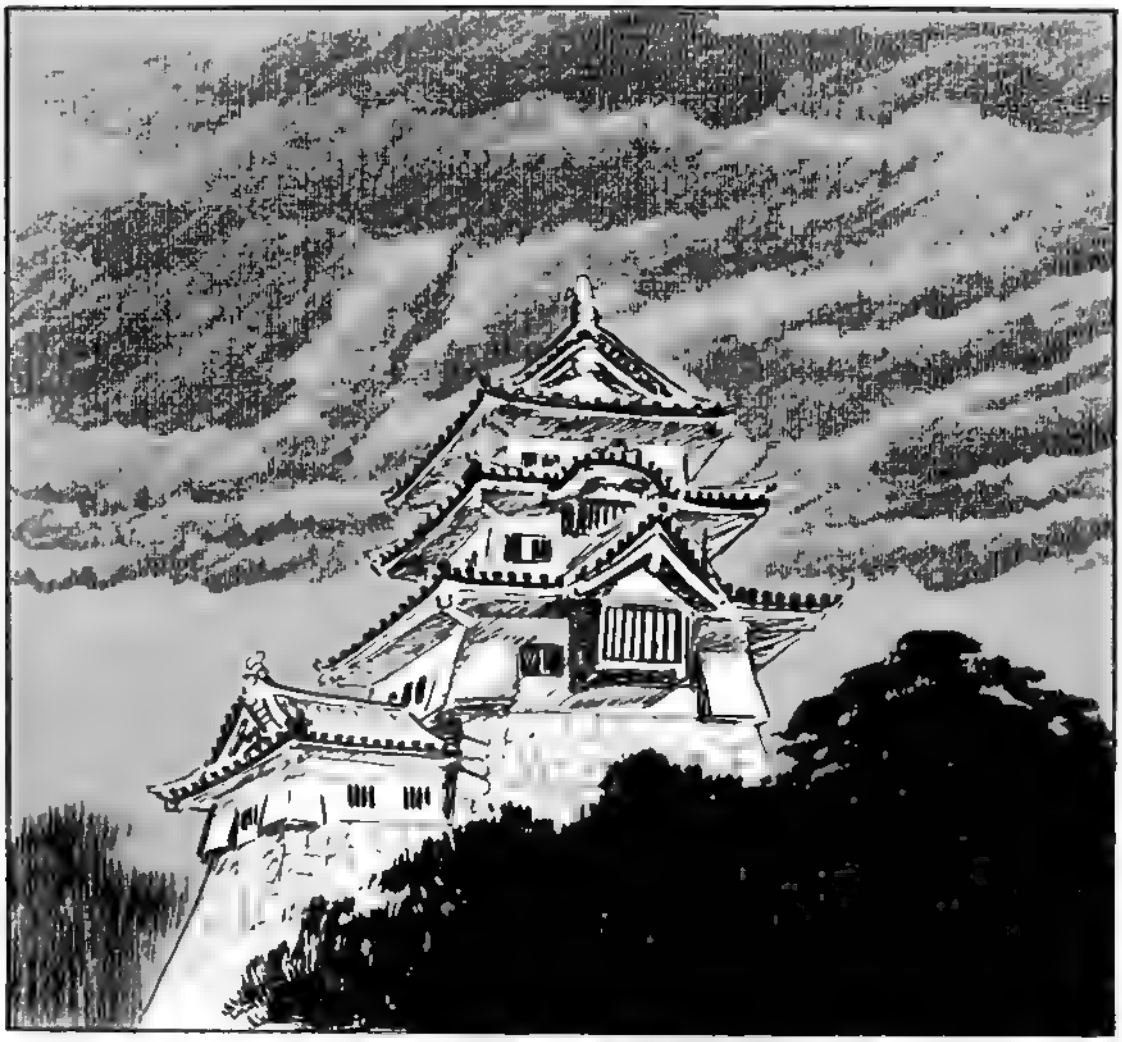

GA
AGH!
IF THE PURPOSE OF WAR IS TO KILL, LOOT AND WIN, THERE'S NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SLAUGHTERING ONE OR SLAUGHTERING A THOUSAND. IT'S RIDICULOUS TO ARGUE OVER WHAT METHOD SHOULD BE USED.


HA HO HO HO
HA HO HO HO
HO HO.
HEH...
HEH...
HA HA
HA HA.
PLEASE
GRANT ME
PERMISSION
TO STRIKE
KANSUKE AND
HARUNOBU.
I THANK YOU
AND APOLOGIZE
FOR MY
IMPERTINENT
CONDUCT.
PLEASE PARDON
ME.
I--
I GRANT YOU
PERMISSION.
PROCEED TO
YOUR HEART'S
CONTENT.
WH--
WHAT A FORMIDABLE
MAN YOU ARE...
W--
WITH YOUR SKILL...
PERHAPS...
HA HA HO HO HO.
...I PROMISE
I WILL NOT
FAIL.
I APOLOGIZE FOR
MY INSOLENCE EVEN
THOUGH I ONLY
ACTED THAT WAY TO
FATHOM YOUR TRUE
INTENTION. AS FOR
SEVERING THE HEADS
OF KANSUKE AND
HARUNOBU ..
MILORD,
YOU ARE THE MAN
OF GREAT CALIBER
I THOUGHT YOU'D
BE.


WHAT IF IT'S POISONED?


I LIKE YOU, KITE KATŌ. STAY IN SUNPU FOR A WHILE AND DO WHATEVER YOU PLEASE. HO HO HO HO.
HA HA HA HO HO HO HO.
HMPH... Y-- YOU DID NOT DRINK... BUT IT SURE DID LOOK LIKE YOU DOWNED IT ALL...


TWENTY DAYS HAVE ALREADY PASSED. I HAD EVERY CORNER OF MY TERRITORY SEARCHED, BUT WE FOUND NO CLUE.
I KEEP A GROUP OF *SUPPA* CALLED *NOKIZARU* UNDER MY WING. BUT A TRIO NAMED SAKKI, DAKKI, AND LINKI WENT MISSING.
I HAVE A FAVOR TO ASK YOU
NOW.
IT'S AN EASY THING TO DO.
WILL YOU FIND OUT WHAT MIGHT HAVE BECOME OF THEM?
DESPITE THAT, HE COULD NOT SUPPRESS THE DESIRE THAT POKED ITS HEAD INTO THE CORNER OF HIS HEART -- THE DESIRE TO HAVE THE CROW-HEADED *TENGU* FIGHT HANZO, A MERE KITTEN OF A *SUPPA*
HOW TROUBLESOME, IEYASU THOUGHT





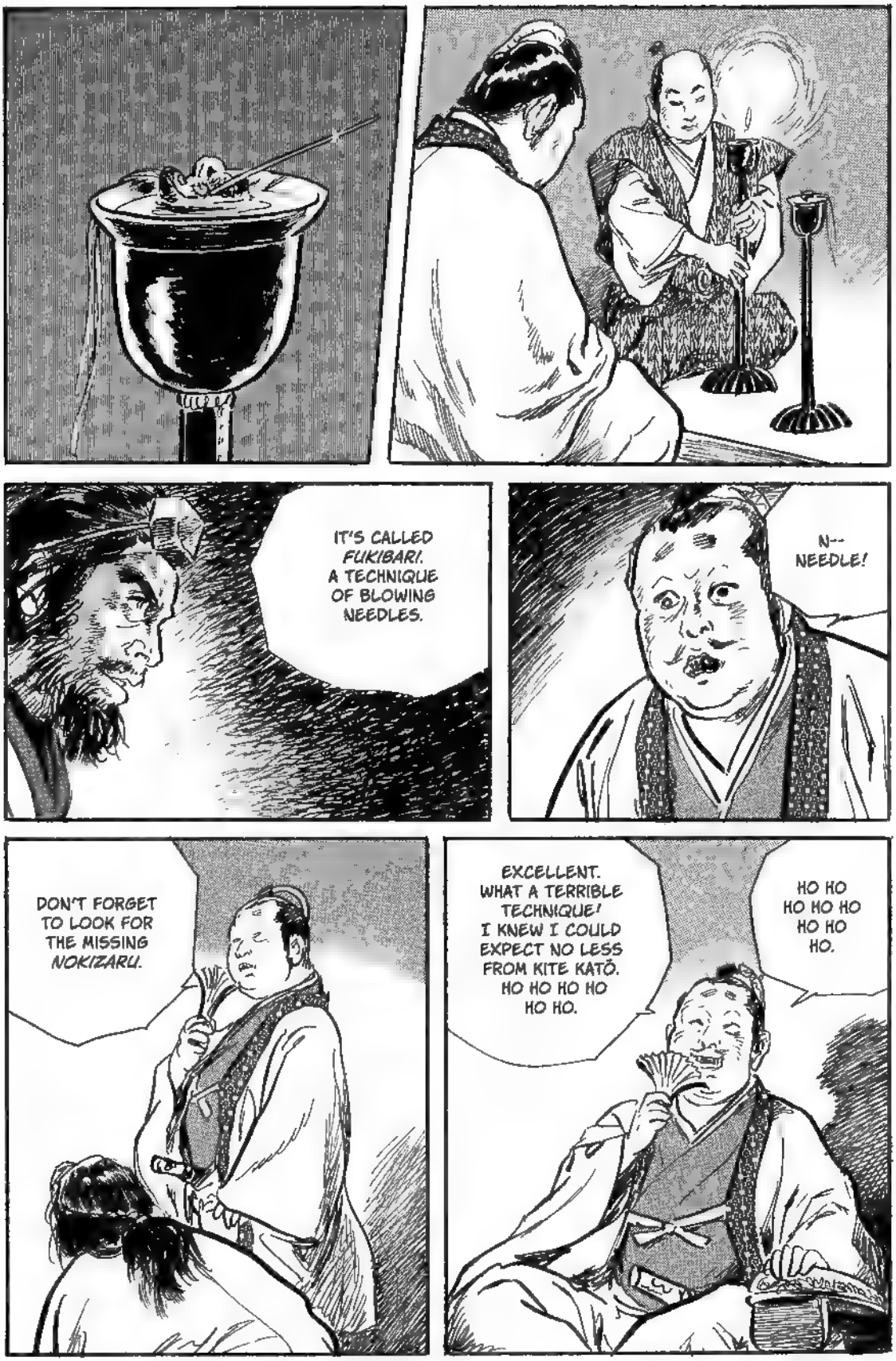

SIP...
GULP

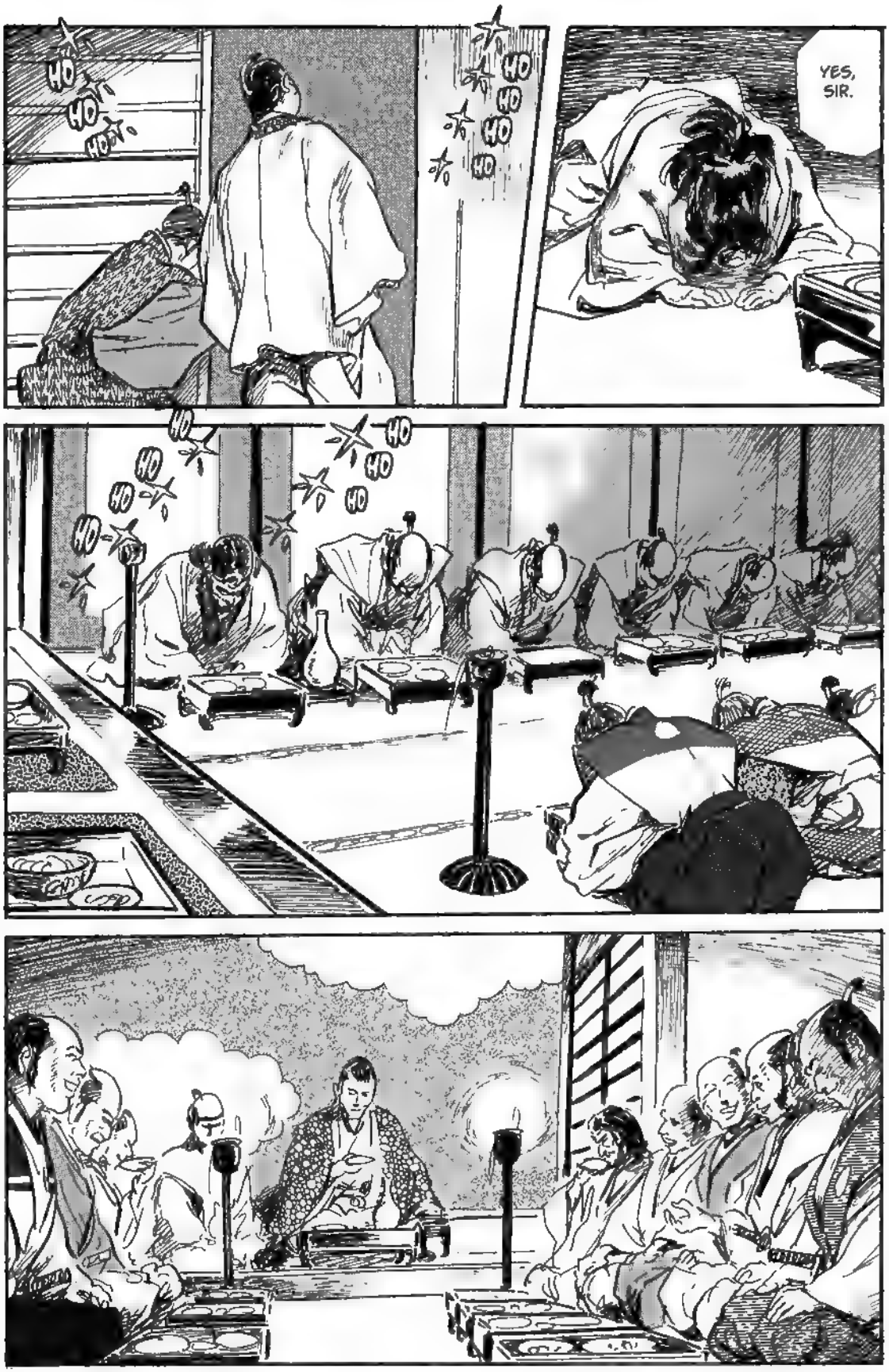

SHOW ME SOME FUN TRICKS.
YES, SIR.
KITE KATŌ.
AS YOU WISH, SIR.


GO OUT!
HOW DID HE DO IT?
WHOA!
AHH!


O--
ONCE AGAIN,
EXTINGUISH THAT
LIGHT

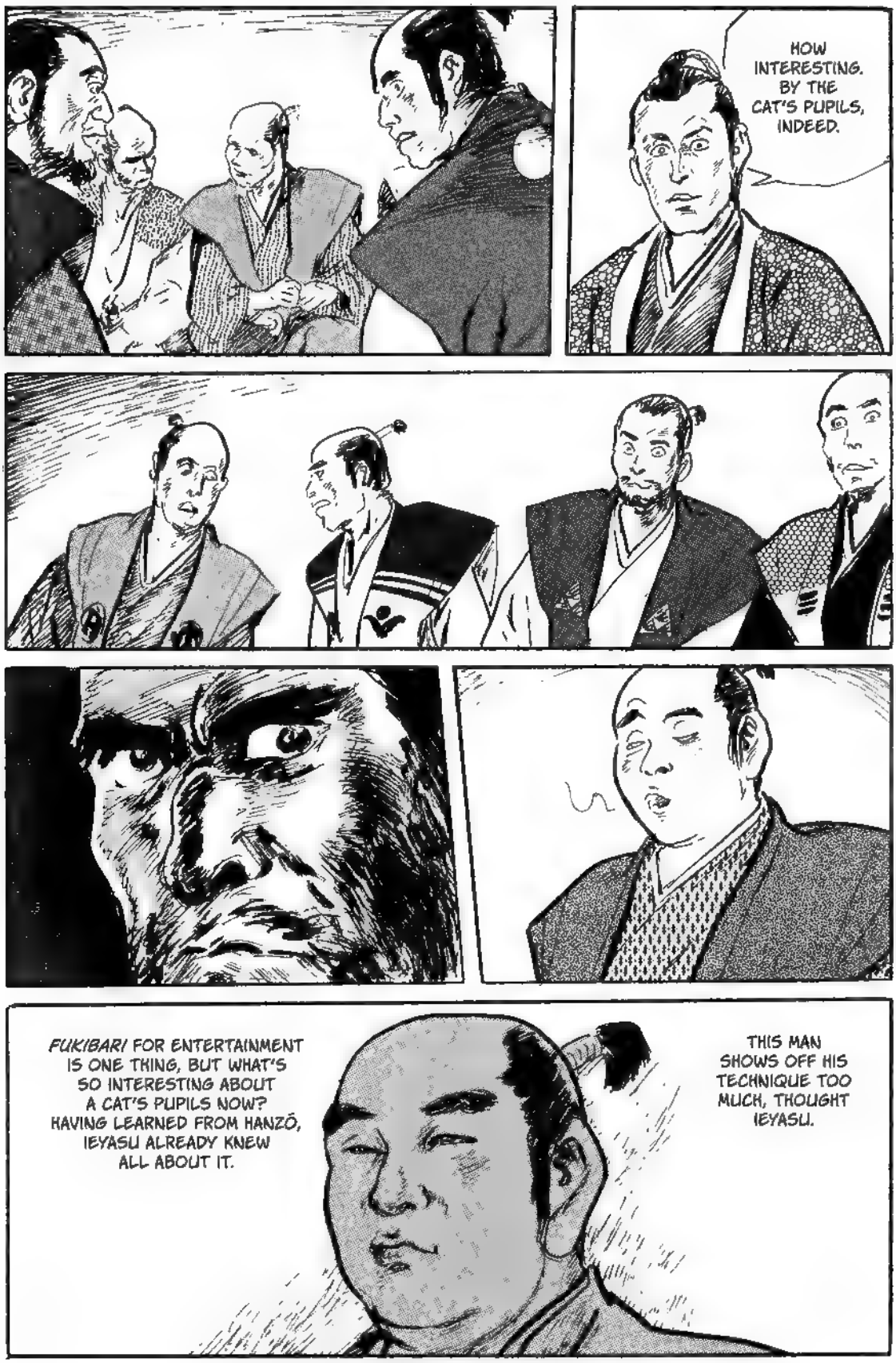

BRING THE LIGHT
BRING OVER THE GIRL THAT WE'VE CAUGHT


IT'S CALLED FUKIBARI. A TECHNIQUE OF BLOWING NEEDLES.
N-- NEEDLE!
DON'T FORGET TO LOOK FOR THE MISSING NOKIZARU.
EXCELLENT. WHAT A TERRIBLE TECHNIQUE! I KNEW I COULD EXPECT NO LESS FROM KITE KATŌ. HO HO HO HO HO HO.
HO HO HO HO HO HO HO.


HO
HO
HO
HO
HO
HO
HO
YES, SIR.
HO
HO
HO
HO
HO
HO


INDEED, I'M IMPRESSED.
む HM...?
わ WHOA!
あ AH!
WHEN DID HE... GET THE CAT?


SUPPA TELL TIME BY THE SIZE OF CAT'S PUPIL.
SIX IS ROUND. FIVE-SEVEN IS EGG. FOUR-EIGHT IS PERSIMMON SEED. AND NINE IS NEEDLE.
CATS ARE INDISPENSABLE FOR SUPPA.
HM...
AT BOTH FOUR AND EIGHT O'CLOCK, IT THINS TO THE SHAPE OF A PERSIMMON'S SEED. BUT AT NINE O'CLOCK, IT BECOMES NEEDLE THIN.
AT SIX O'CLOCK, A CAT'S PUPIL LOOKS ROUND. AT BOTH FIVE AND SEVEN O'CLOCK, IT FORMS AN EGG.


HOW INTERESTING. BY THE CAT'S PUPILS, INDEED.
*FUKIBARI* FOR ENTERTAINMENT IS ONE THING, BUT WHAT'S SO INTERESTING ABOUT A CAT'S PUPILS NOW? HAVING LEARNED FROM HANZŌ, IEYASU ALREADY KNEW ALL ABOUT IT.
THIS MAN SHOWS OFF HIS TECHNIQUE TOO MUCH, THOUGHT IEYASU.


MILORD
MILORD
WHAT ?!
YOU'RE BEING FOLLOWED


RUN THE HORSE TO THE BEACH. WE'LL FIND OUT WHO IT IS. THERE'S NO PLACE TO HIDE AROUND THE SANDY SHORE.
HUH? THERE'S NO REASON FOR ANYONE TO FOLLOW ME. BUT WHO THE HELL?
A VERY SKILLED *SUPPA*, I THINK.
ERASING ALL SIGNS AND SUPPRESSING SOUND, SOMEONE IS SHADOWING YOU.
BUHIIN
HYAAAAA
HM.


STMP
STMP
CRMP
CRMP



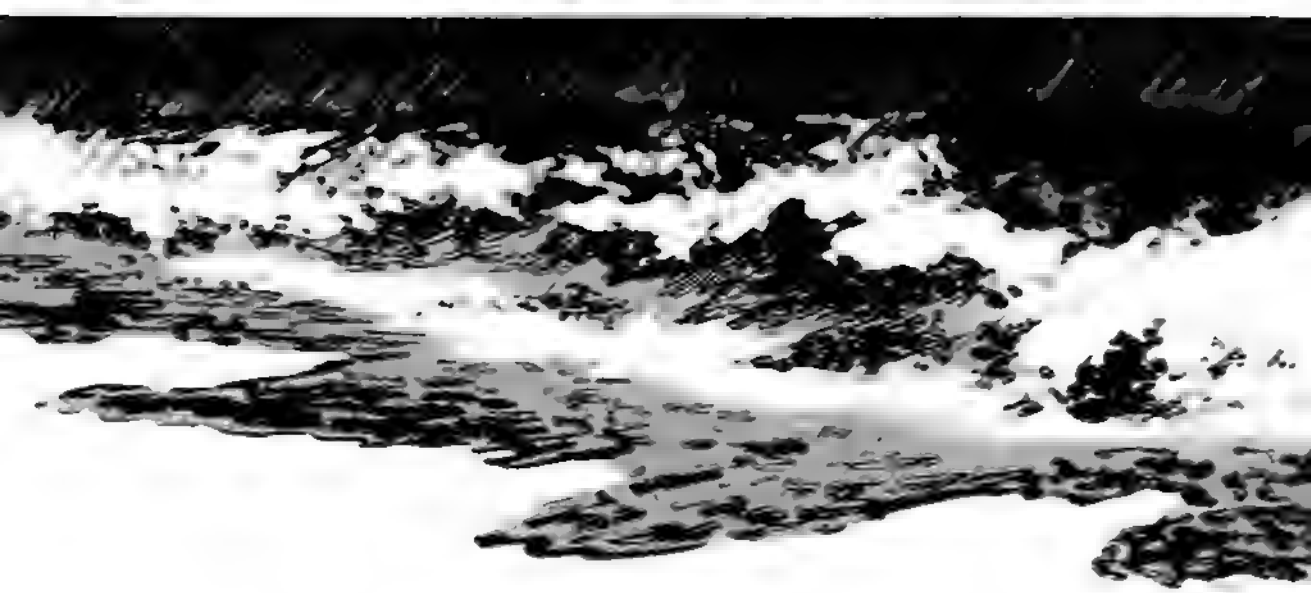


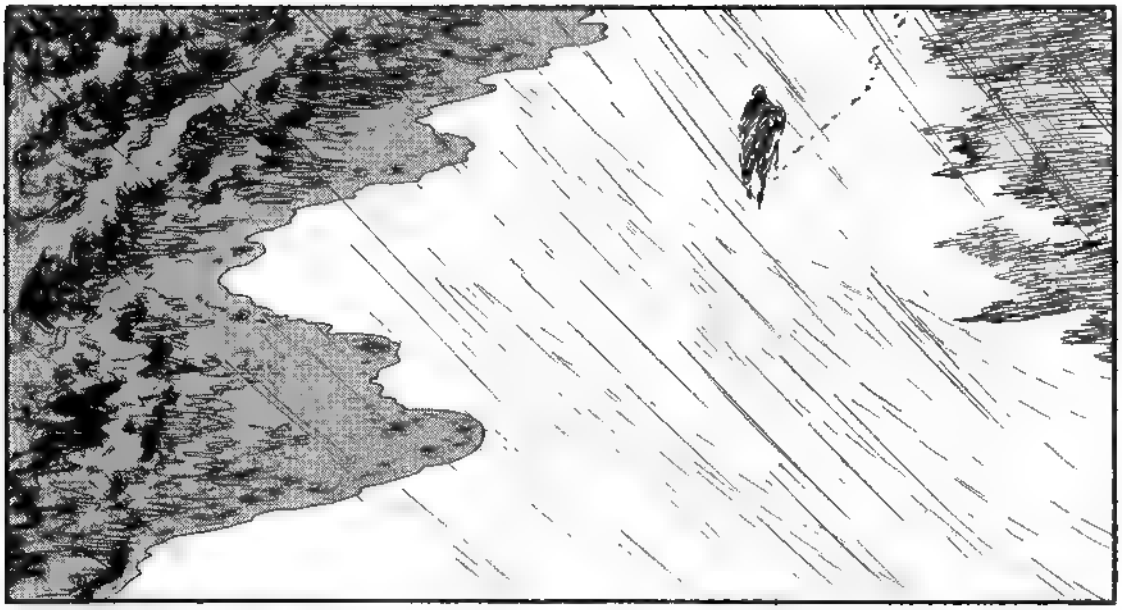



BUT WHY...?!
AT THE SAME TIME, HE WAS NOT BEWILDERED. HE HAD A REASON TO BE FOLLOWED.
HANZŌ'S WARNING THAT A VERY SKILLED *SUPPA* WAS SHADOWING HIM MADE IEYASU NERVOUS, THINKING IT MIGHT BE THE KITE KATŌ.

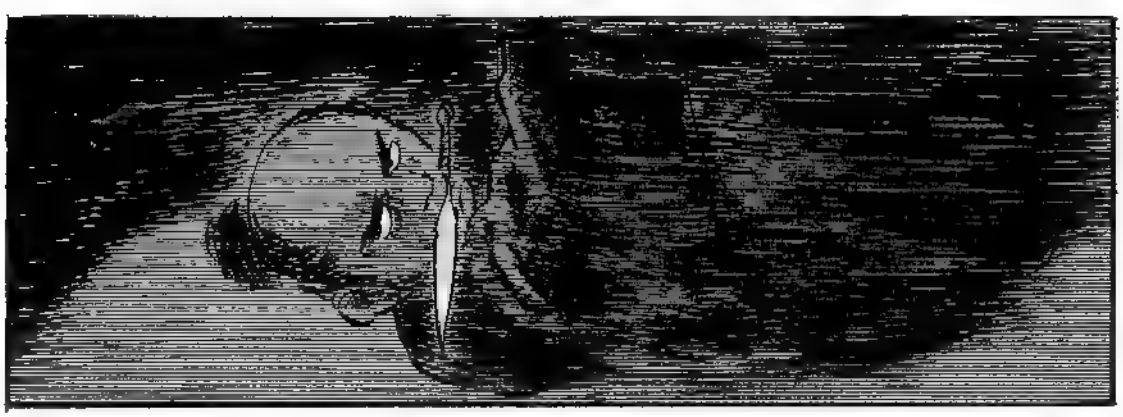

IEYASU TOOK PART IN IT, TOO HOWEVER, NOT EVEN A QUARTER OF AN HOUR HAD PASSED SINCE KITE KATŌ WAS ORDERED TO PROBE THE MYSTERY
IT WAS HANZŌ WHO TOOK CARE OF UNKI, SAKKI, AND DAKKI, THE NOKIZARU TRIO.
BESIDES, HE HADN'T EVEN GONE OUTSIDE THE CASTLE TO MAKE INQUIRIES. HE HADN'T EVEN EXCHANGED A WORD WITH IEYASU.
AND IEYASU FELT A STRANGE CHILL ENTER HIS HEART
THE POUNDING SLEET WAS VERY COLD.

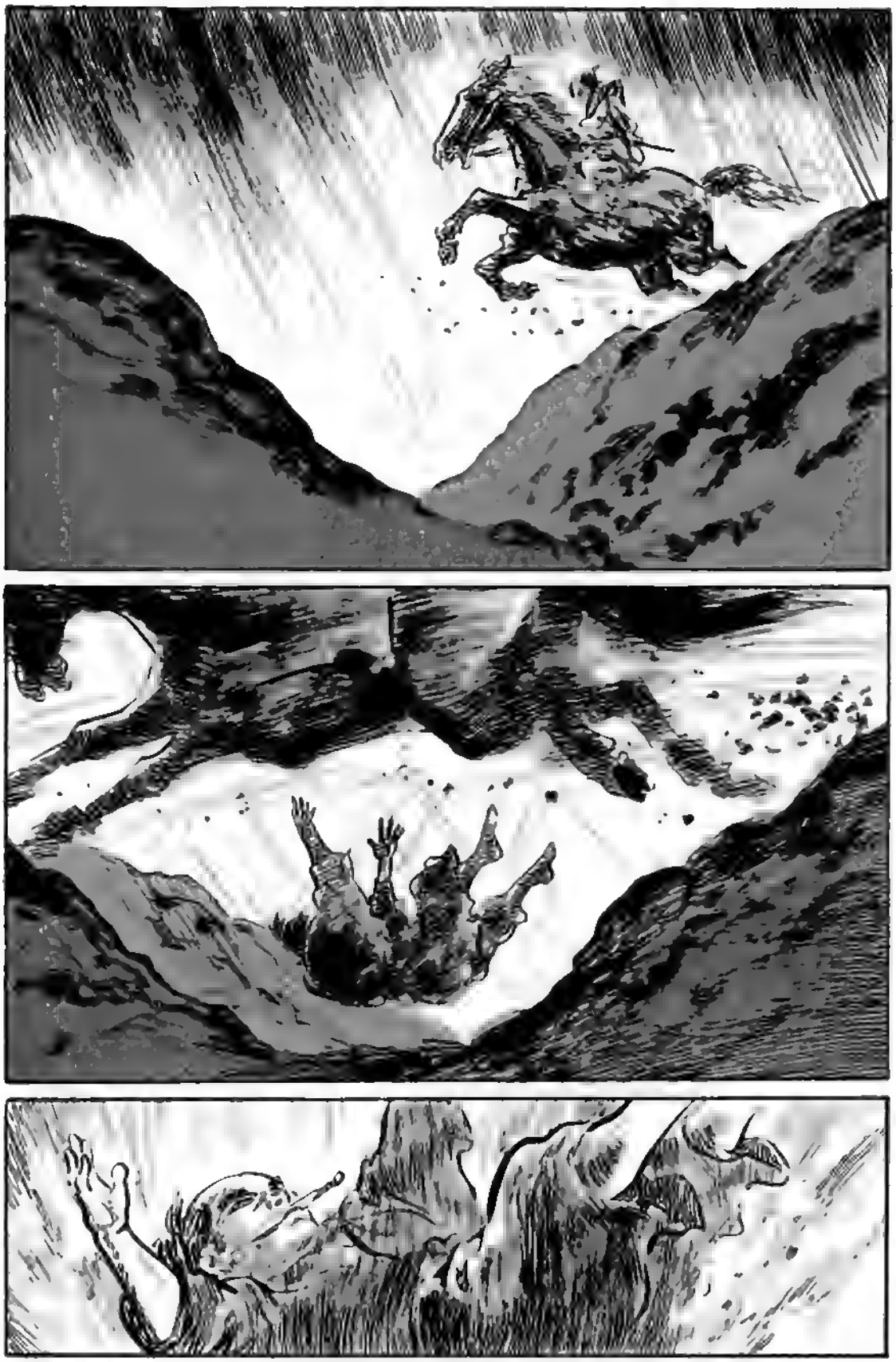


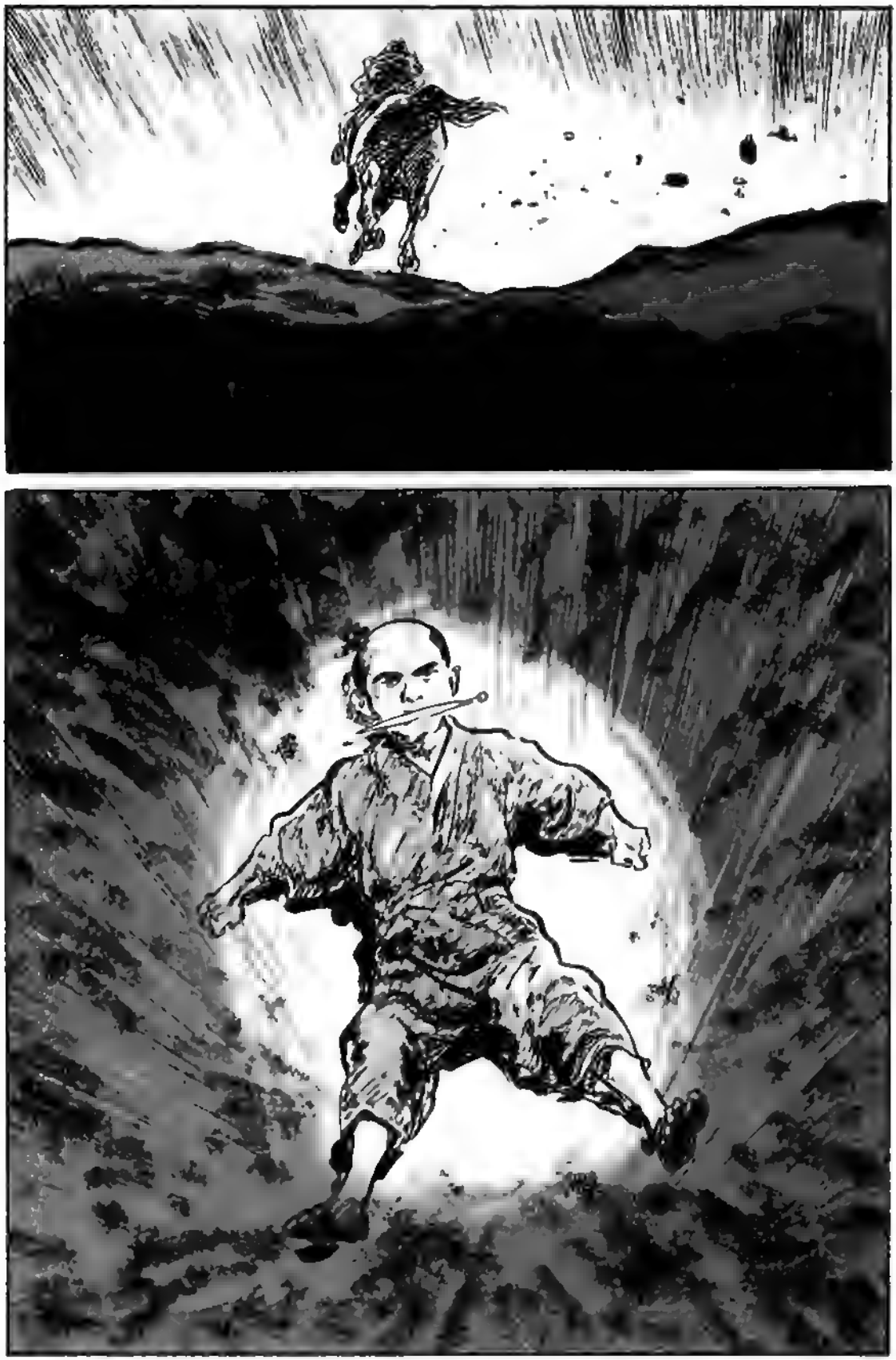


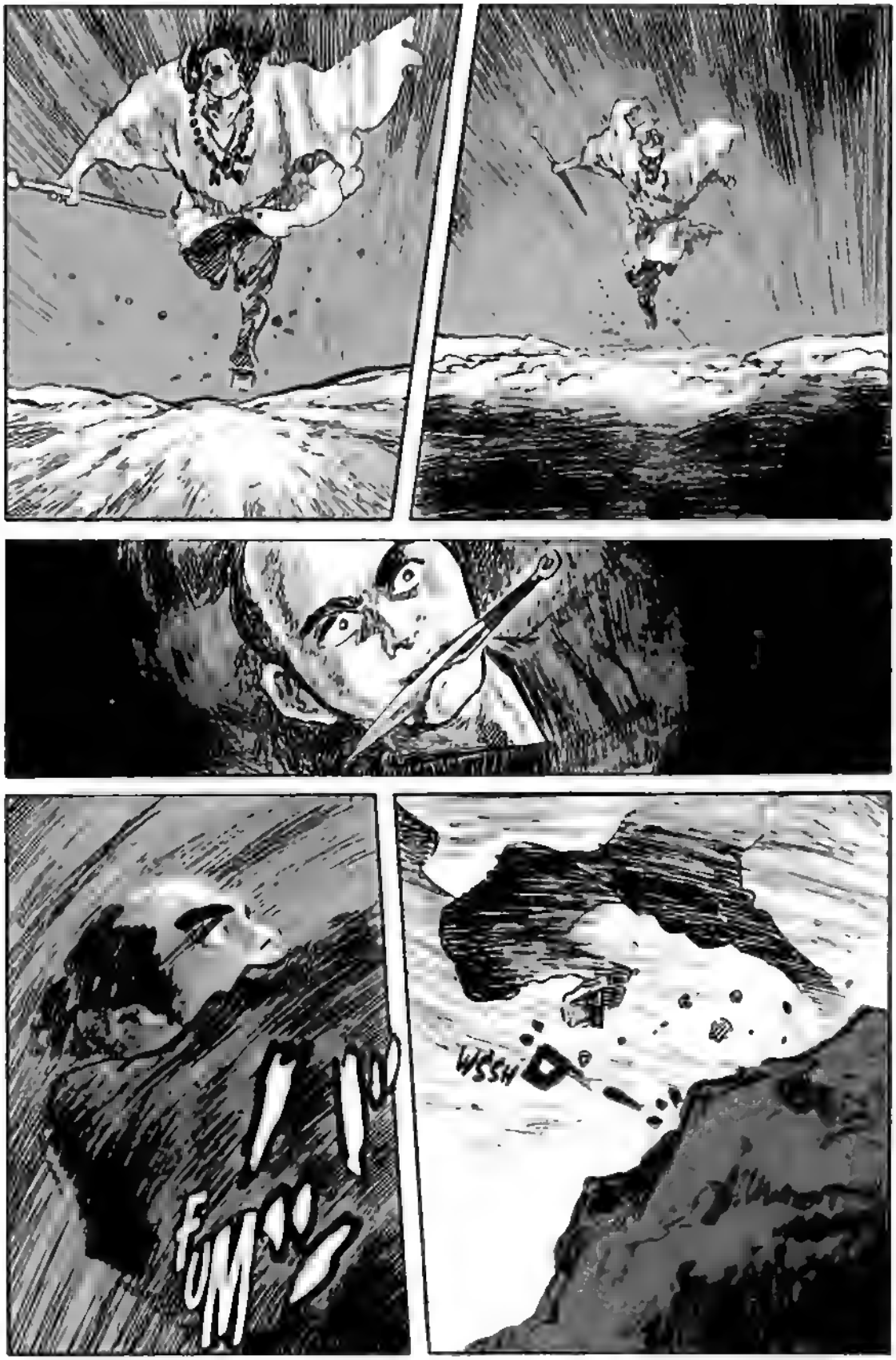




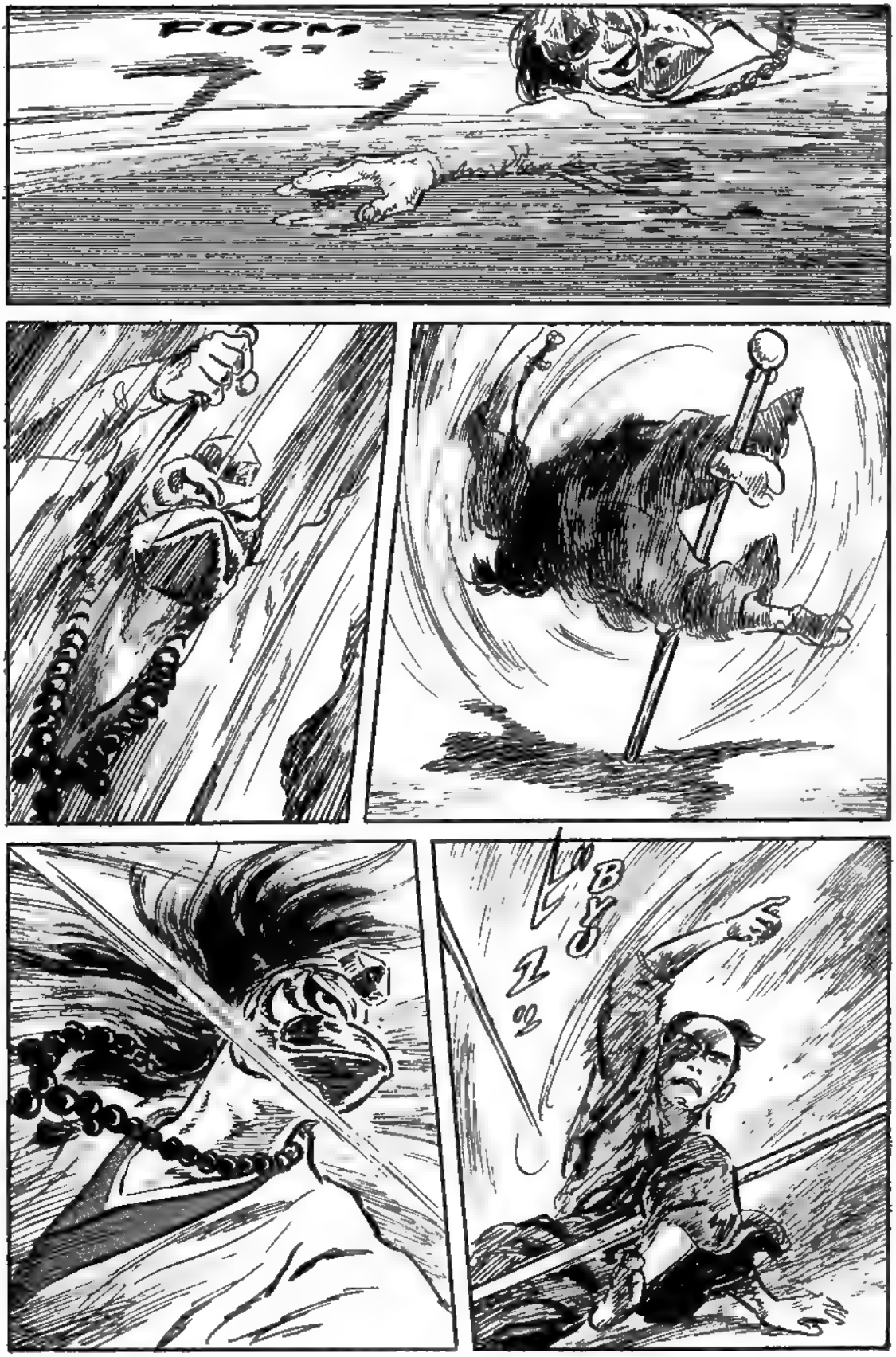







WSSH
FUM




FOOM
BYU
ZZ


HUH.
WHOOSH

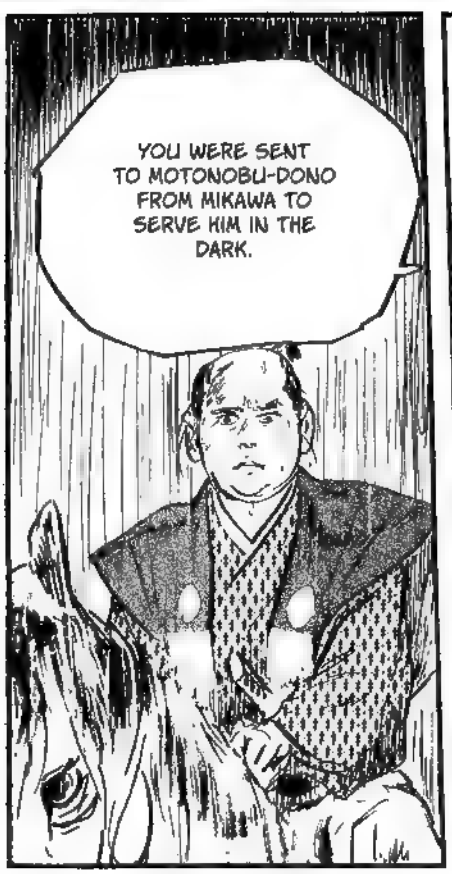



W--
WHAT...?
MOTONOBU-
DONO, I KNEW
IT WAS YOU.
...
...
I MEAN,
IT'S YOU WHO
KILLED THE
NOKIZARU
TRIO.
THAT MEANT YOU
ALREADY KNEW.
AND THAT MEANT
YOU KEPT SUPPA--
NOTHING ELSE.
WHEN I TALKED ABOUT
HOW A CAT'S PUPILS CAN
TELL THE TIME, YOU
LOOKED VERY BORED.


TO FIND OUT WHO MIGHT BE KEEPING THEM...
THE NOKIZARU TRIO WOULDN'T HAVE GONE MISSING WITHOUT REASON. ONLY SUPPA CAN SEND SUPPA TO THEIR GRAVES.
. . I INTENTIONALLY TOLD A NEAT, MEANINGLESS STORY.
BE THAT AS IT MAY, YOU ARE THAT SUPPA.

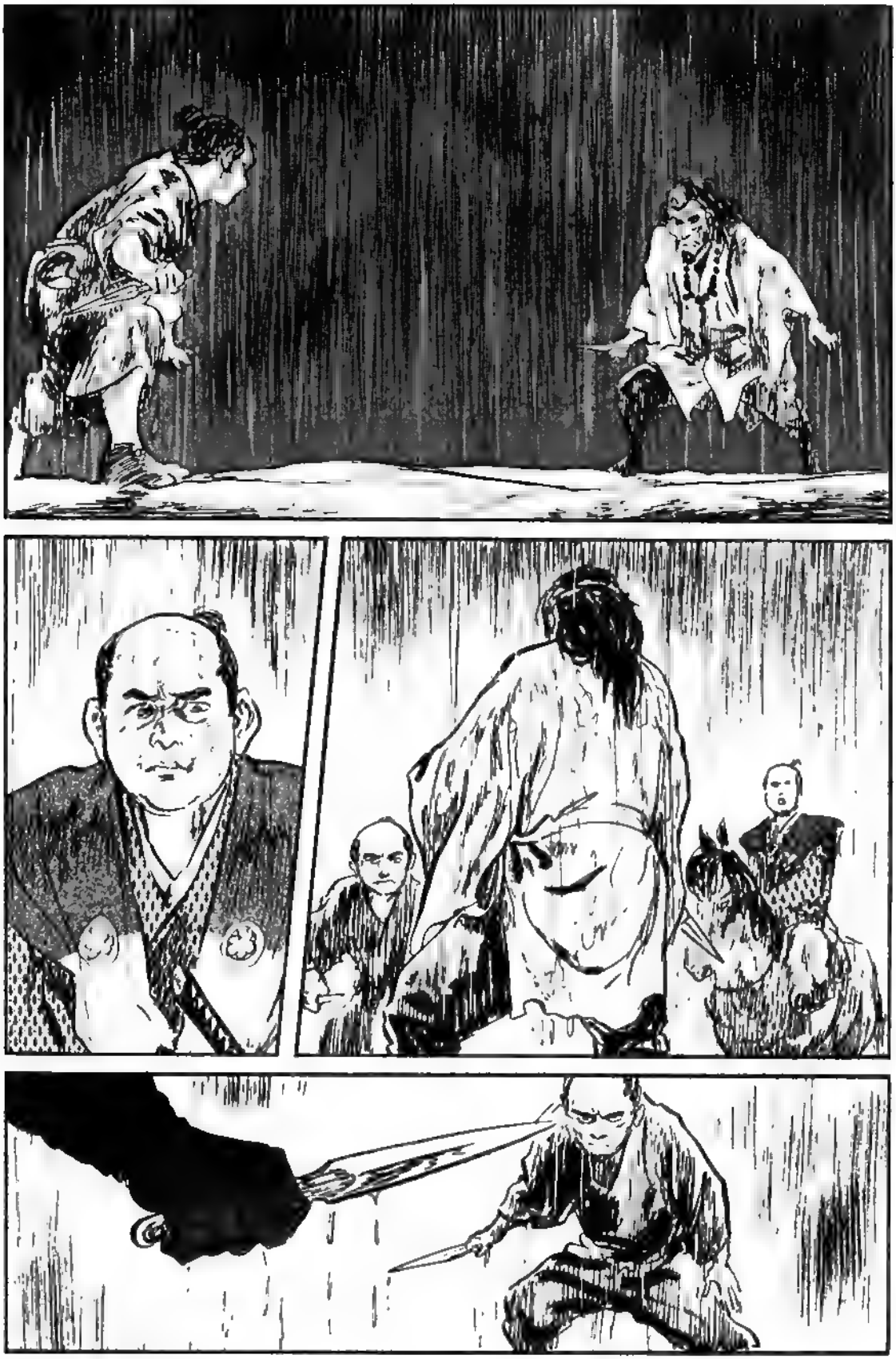

NO WONDER YOU SENT THEM OFF TO DEATH.
YOUR NAME?!
YOU'RE GOOD.
A SON OF JŌKANNIYŪDŌ OF IGA!
HMM.....
HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI.


ZAAAA


YOU WERE SENT TO MOTONOBU-DONO FROM MIKAWA TO SERVE HIM IN THE DARK.


NOW I SEE THINGS CLEARLY.
SO THAT'S IT.


HM... HOW FRIGHTFULLY PERCEPTIVE...
AND THE *NOKIZARU* TRIO FOUND YOU ON PATROL, SO YOU HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO BURY THEM.




SON OF JŌKANNYŪDŌ...
IT IS TO ENDURE.
WHAT IS SUPPA?
VERY WELL.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ENDURE?
TO WITHSTAND ANYTHING BY HOLDING A BLADE IN ONE'S HEART.


I HAVE NO GRUDGE AGAINST YOU. IN FACT, AS *SUPPA* MYSELF, I WISH I COULD LET YOU GO UNCHALLENGED.
EVEN MORE SO SINCE YOU'RE JŌKANNYŪDŌ'S SON...
BUT AS A GUEST OF IMAGAWA, I PROMISED THE LORD HIMSELF IN FRONT OF HIS SAMURAI.
IF I LET YOU OFF THE HOOK, I'LL HAVE MY ABILITIES QUESTIONED.
SO I SHALL ENDURE!!
IT WILL BE YET ANOTHER BLADE IN MY HEART, TO SURVIVE THE PAIN OF TAKING YOUR LIFE.
TO ACHIEVE MY GREATER GOAL, I MUST ALSO ENDURE HAVING MOTONOBU-DONO QUESTIONED AT THE PUBLIC OFFICE.

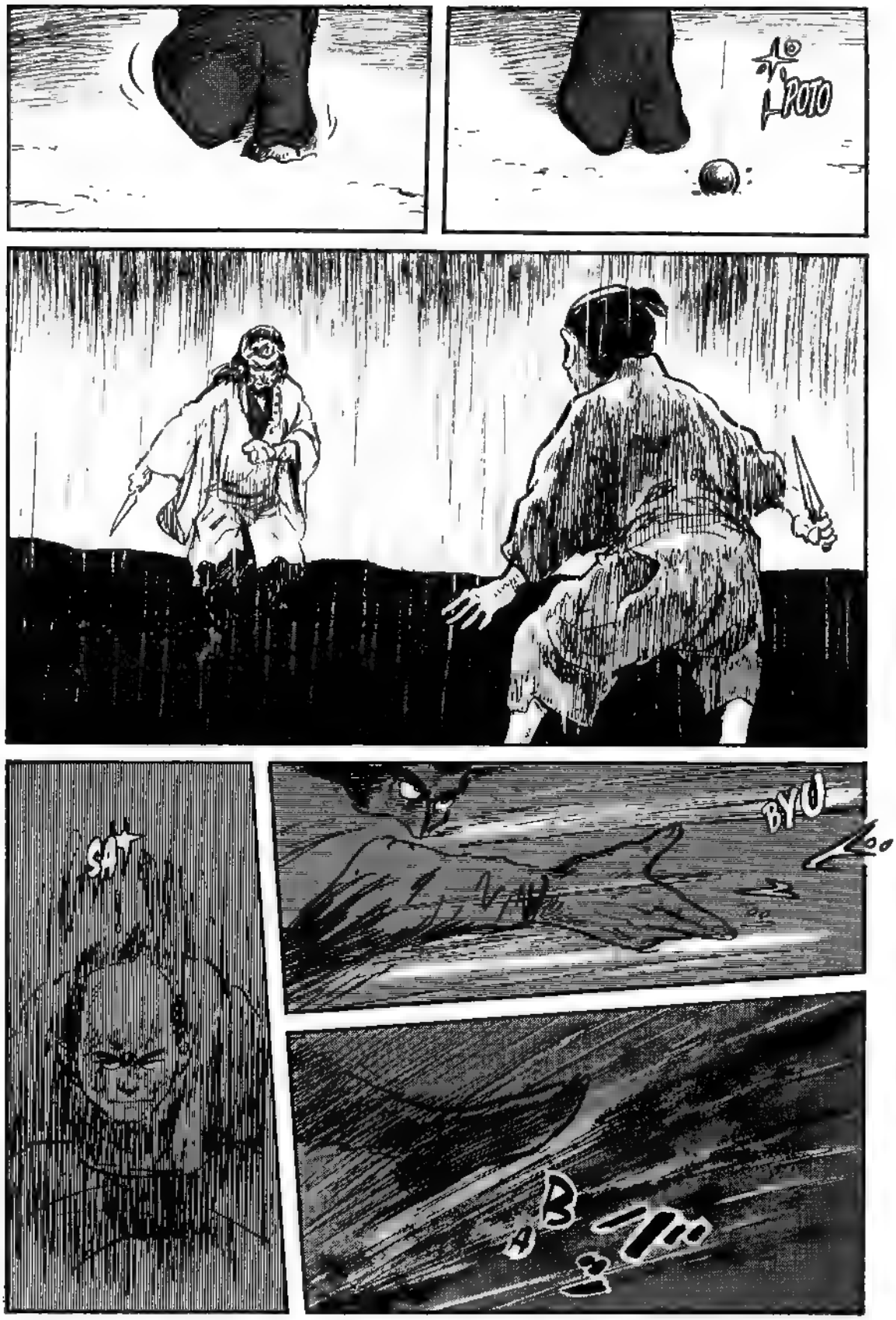

YOU TALK A LOT.










POTO
SAT
BYU


AHH
INJI
NUREZUNA
UCHI.




EVEN IF HANZÓ WINS, IF HE DOES SO WITH A HELP OF AN OUTSIDER, HE WON'T WANT TO LIVE.
MOTONOBU-DONO, RECEIVING AN AID DURING A DUEL WITH ANOTHER *SUPPA* IS A DISGRACE WORSE THAN DEATH.
BA
BYU




ﾌﾞﾄﾞ
JA



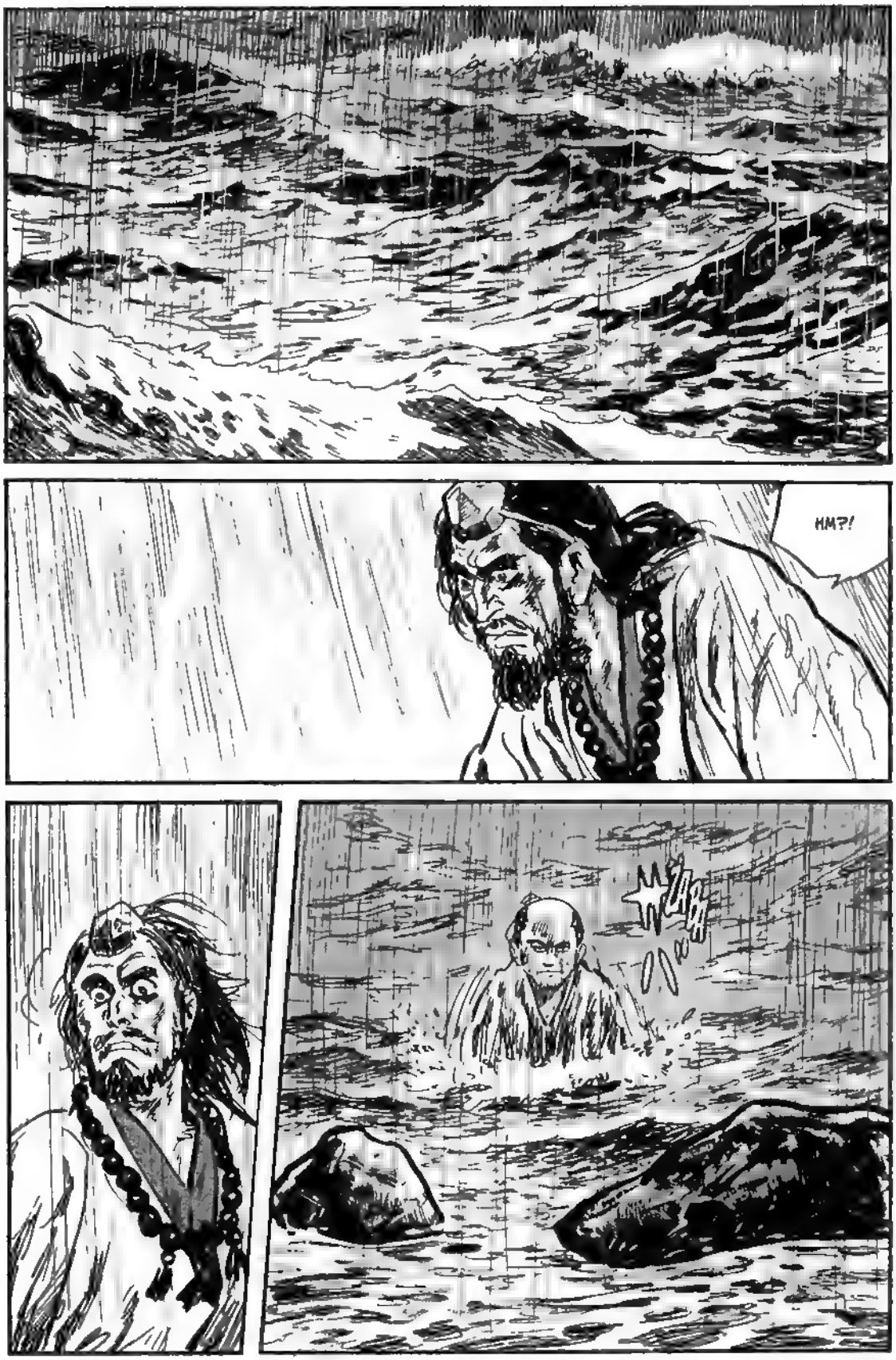





DRIVEN INTO A CORNER, HANZŌ'S LIFE WAS NOTHING BUT A CANDLE FLICKERING IN THE WIND... IEYASU COULDN'T HELP BUT THINK SO
HM?!


SEEING FEARLESSNESS RADIATE FROM HANZŌ'S FACE...
...IEYASU BEGAN TO FEEL MYSTIFIED.
?!
...WHILE SEEING THE IRRITATION IN DANZŌ....


RRR!


HM?!


DAMN YOU, MONKEY!
WE CAN'T SETTLE THINGS LIKE THIS.
GET OUT OF THE OCEAN.


I'M TELLING YOU TO GET OUT INSTEAD!
IF YOU WANT TO BRING ME DOWN, ALL YOU NEED IS TO GET IN THE WATER YOURSELF.
THERE ISN'T ANYTHING THAT CAN DO THAT.
HEH HEH HEH HEH.
THE ONLY TECHNIQUE I CAN USE TO DEFEAT YOU.
IF I DO, I WON'T BE ABLE TO USE MY BEST TECHNIQUE.
THE TECHNIQUE OF YOUTH.


THEREFORE, ENDURING THE CURRENT STATE OF GLARING AT EACH OTHER WITHOUT FIGHTING IS ALSO A TECHNIQUE
THE WAY OF THE NINJA IS ALSO THE TECHNIQUE OF ENDURANCE
RRRRR .
WHICH ONE OF US CAN ENDURE LONGER IN THE RAIN? THAT'S MY TRICK-- THE ONLY TECHNIQUE THAT CAN DEFEAT YOU.


YOU DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO MOTONOBU-DONO, THEN?
IF YOU REFUSE TO GET OUT, I WILL FLAY HIM OPEN. THAT WOULD MEAN YOU DESERTED YOUR MASTER.
AFTER YOU WERE RECEIVED AS A GUEST, DO YOU MEAN TO MAKE IMAGAWA YOUR ENEMY? WHAT BENEFIT DO YOU GAIN BY ATTACKING MY LORD?
UNLESS YOU TAKE MY CORPSE TO THE PUBLIC OFFICE AS PROOF, THERE'S NO POINT.
I WILL NOT GIVE IN!
YOU DON'T WANT TO EXPOSE THE UGLINESS OF AN OLD MAN.


OHH.


YAMAMOTO KANSUKE, THE WAR STRATEGIST OF TAKEDA, WAS BORN IN MEIŌ YEAR TWO (1493 A.D.), I BELIEVE. IF SO, HE MUST BE SIXTY-FOUR NOW.
YOU MUST BE THE KITE KATŌ I'VE HEARD OF.
S-- STOP IT.
YOU ARE CONSIDERABLY OLDER THAN YAMAMOTO-DONO. PROBABLY OVER SEVENTY ALREADY AND APPROACHING EIGHTY--
PLEASE... STOP IT


IT'S...
ENOUGH...
LET'S NOT FIGHT...
I--
I'VE LOST THE WILL
NOW THAT YOU'VE
SEEN ME THIS WAY...
IT'S--
IT'S COLD...
THE RAIN
PIERCES ME...
UHH...
SHIVER
SHIVER


I CANNOT COME OUT JUST YET.
THE FIGHT ENDS WHEN ONE OF US FREEZES TO DEATH.
GET OUT OF THE OCEAN... AND BE GONE.
Y-- YOU BEAT ME.
HUH.


I WILL LEAVE IMAGAWA, AND I WANT YOU TO DO ME A FAVOR.
I CANNOT BEAR TO LIVE IF MY TRUE IDENTITY IS KNOWN.
SAY NO WORD ABOUT MY REAL APPEARANCE.
YES.


MY LIFE IS ALL ABLAZE DESPITE MY AGE. BUT IN THE RAIN THE GODS QUESTION WHO I AM
HOW HUMILIATING! I WILL NEVER FORGET YOUR NAME, HANZO
HOW HUMILIATING! A LITTLE SLEET WOULD EXPOSE ME

# GLOSSARY

**bugyō**
A high-ranking samurai official. A commissioner.

**chikuwa**
Chikuwa is a Japanese tube-like food product made from ingredients like fish surimi, salt, sugar, starch, and egg white.

**Emperor Go-Nara**
(1497-1557) The 105th imperial ruler of Japan. He reigned from June 9, 1526 until September 27, 1557, at the end of the warring states era. His personal name was Tomohito.

**honorifics**
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*:
*chan* – for children, young women, and close friends
*dono* – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
*san* – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
*sama* – used for superiors
*sensei* – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

**Imagawa Sessai**
Imagawa Yoshimoto's uncle (Yoshimoto's father's younger brother).

**Imagawa Yoshimoto**
Yoshimoto (1519-1560) was one of the leading in Suruga along the Tokaido region, Japan. He was killed by the assault of Oda Nobunaga at the battle of Okehazama.

**inji nurezuna uchi**
*Inji* = metal stone, *nurezuna* = wet sand, *uchi* = throw. It's a name for a technique of throwing/kicking metal stones from wet sand.

**jisatsu**
Consists of kanji characters: *ji* (ear) + *satsu* (kill)

**kamaboko**
Kamaboko is a variety of Japanese processed seafood products in which various white fish are pureed, formed into distinctive loaves, and then steamed until fully cooked and firm in texture.

**kakute**
The *kakute* or "horn finger" is a metal ring that has two metal spikes attached. The *kakute* was worn usually on the middle finger.

**kemari**
Kemari is a so-called sport that was popular in Japan and China in the Heian period. The object of *kemari* is to keep a small, deerskin ball in the air, with all players cooperating to do so.

**kite**
Kites are raptors with long wings and weak legs.

**koku**
A *koku* is a unit of volume in Japan, equal to ten cubic *shaku*. Approximately 3.6 *koku* equal one cubic meter. The *koku* was originally defined as quantity of rice, historically defined as enough rice to feed one person for one year.

**Kōji**
Kōji was a Japanese era after Temmon and before Eiroku and spanned from 1555 to 1558. Reigning emperors were Go-Nara and Ōgimachi.

**Meio**
Meio was a Japanese era after Entoku and before Bunki and spanned from 1492 to 1501. Reigning emperors were Go-Tsuchimikado and Go-Kashiwabara.

**mizuki**
Mizuki translates to "water princess."

**ningen**
Human being.

**nokizaru**
Another name for ninja. A group of *nokizaru* that worked under Uesugi Kenshin is especially famous.

**ryuha**
Ryuha may be translated to "schools" or "styles" or "traditions." Elongated form of "ryu."

**Suwa Yorishige**
(d. 1542) Was lord of Kuwabara castle when it was attacked by Takeda Shingen in 1542. Suwa surrendered and was escorted to Takeda's capital at Köfu under peaceful pretexts, but was then forced to commit suicide.

**Takeda Nobutora**
(1493-1573) A Japanese feudal lord (*daimyo*) who controlled the province of Kai and fought in a number of battles of the Sengoku period. He was the father of the famous Takeda Shingen, who was originally named Harunobu, along with two other sons, Nobushige and Nobukado.

**Tenbun**
Tenbun (or Temmon or Tembun) was a Japanese era after Kyŏroku and before Kōji and spanned from 1532 to 1555. The reigning emperor was Go-Nara.

**tengu**
*Tengu* are minor *kami* found in Japanese folklore. They are a part of the traditions of most Japanese religions including Shinto and Buddhism, where they are classified as *marakayikas*. They are sometimes identified with the gods Saruta-Hiko, Susanoo, and Karura. Tengu are popular subjects of Japanese art, theater, and literature.

**Ujizane**
(1538-1614) Son of Yoshimoto Imagawa. After Yoshimoto's death he was attacked by Shingen and Ieyasu. Ujizane later retaliated at the Takeda army by stopping their supply of salt. This had little effect and only resulted in the downfall of the Imagawa clan. Like his father he also enjoyed playing *kemari*.

**Yamamoto Kansuke**
Yamamoto Haruyuki (later called Yamamoto Kansuke) was originally from Mikawa province and sought service with the Imagawa family, who doubted he had any worth and so received him coldly (he was said to have been partially lame in one leg). Some time later he was noticed by Takeda general Itagaki Nobutaka and granted an audience with Takeda Shingen of Kai. Shingen was so impressed with Haruyuki that he gave him a 1,000-*koku* fief and afterwards summoned him from time to time for advice. Yamamoto quickly proved his worth to his new lord on campaign, providing valuable service during Shingen's wars in Shinano.

# KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.



# GOSEKI KOJIMA

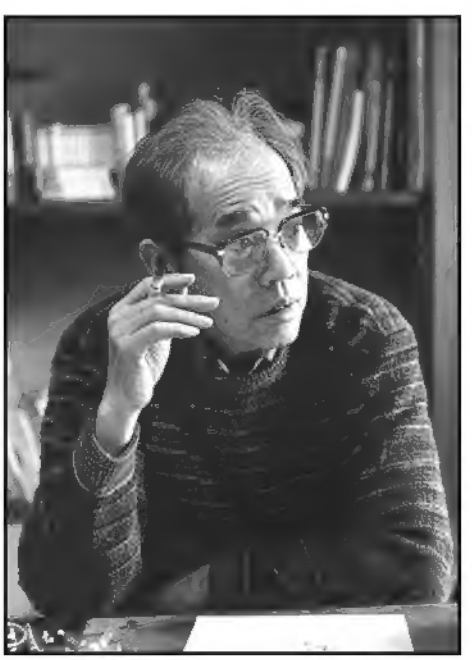
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

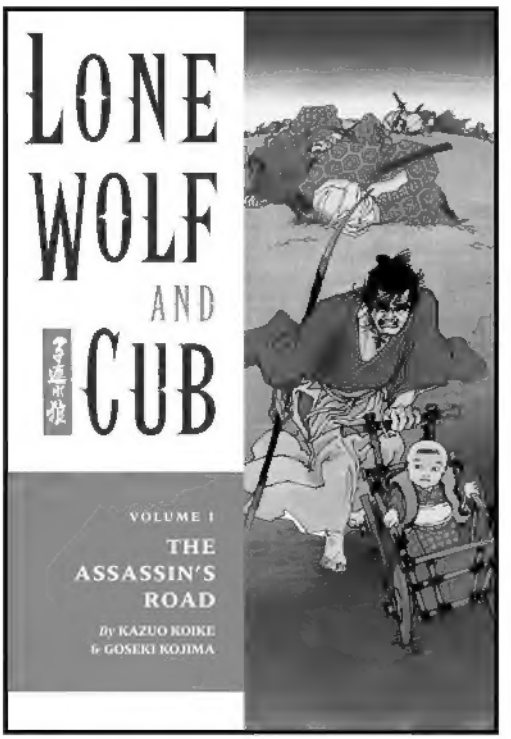
In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including this related series, *Samurai Executioner*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of 71.

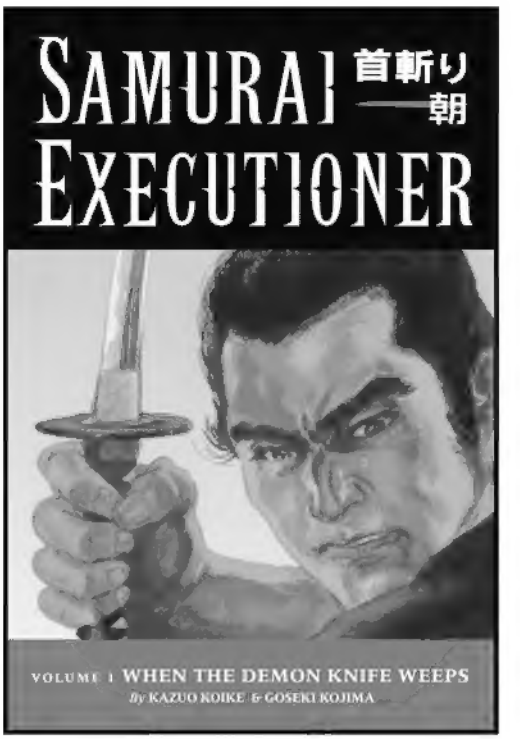


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### *Samurai Executioner*
**Volumes 1-10**

Before Koike and Kojima created Itto Ogami, the wandering ronin of *Lone Wolf and Cub*, they created Kubikiri Asa, better known to *Lone Wolf* readers as Decapitator Asaemon, bearer of the sword Onibocho and the man charged with the duty of testing the swords for the shogun. *Samurai Executioner* is based on the decapitator himself, in life before his fatal duel with Lone Wolf.

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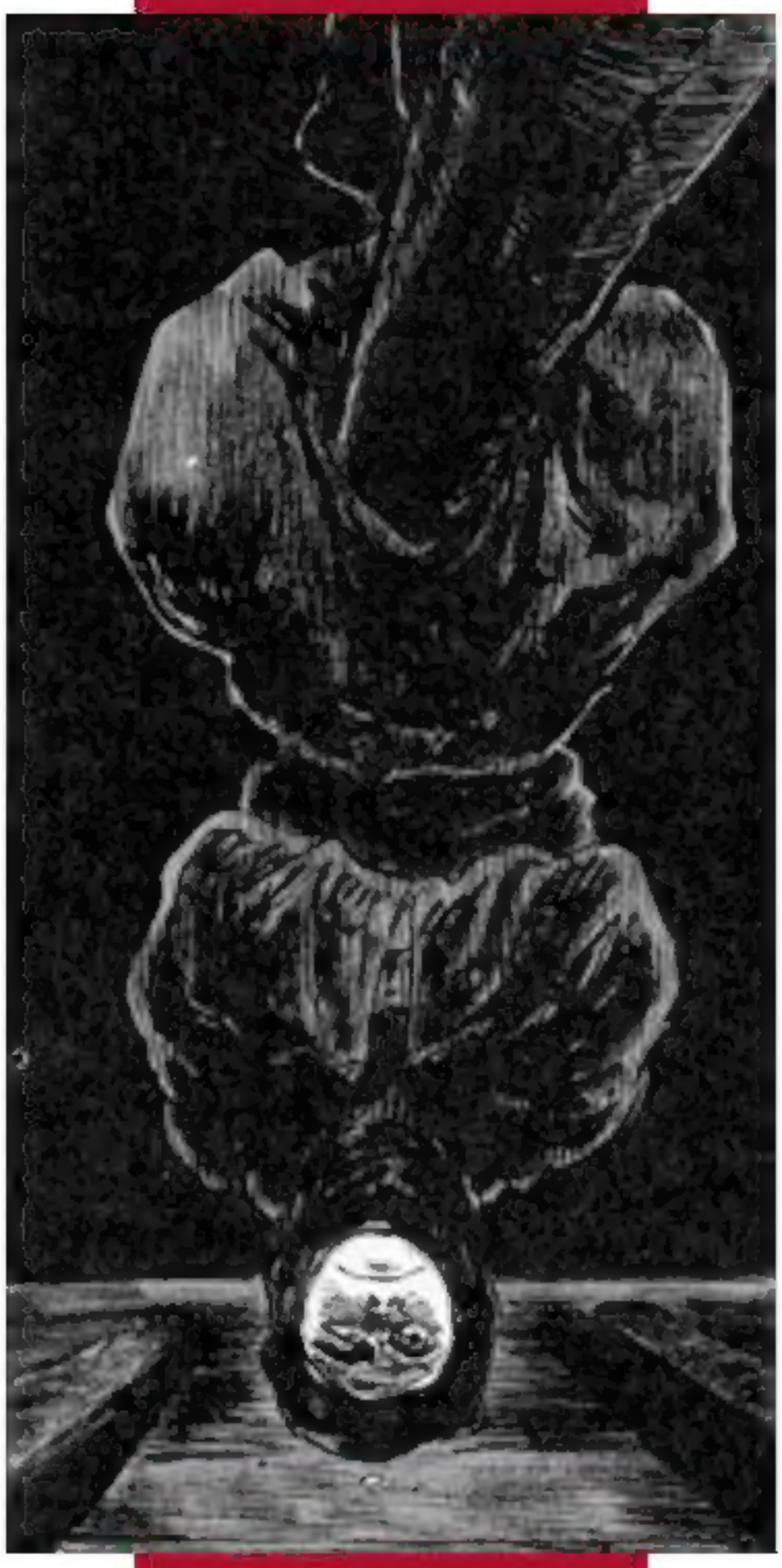
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# STOP! THIS IS THE BACK OF THE BOOK!

This manga collection is translated into English but oriented in right-to-left reading format at the creator's request, maintaining the artwork's visual orientation as originally published in Japan. If you've never read manga in this way before, take a look at the diagram below to give yourself an idea of how to go about it. Basically, you'll be starting in the upper right corner and will read each balloon and panel moving right to left. It may take some getting used to, but you should get the hang of it very quickly. Have fun!


2
ALSO, THERE IS NO TEAMING UP. YOU MUST ACT ALONE. IF THE OLDER BROTHER SUCCEEDS, THE YOUNGER BROTHER IS EXCUSED. IF NOT, THE YOUNGER BROTHER WILL TRY WHAT THE OLDER BROTHER FAILED.
1
I SAID UNNOTICED. THAT MEANS YOU MUST NOT RAISE A RACKET.
4
STEAL IT QUIETLY AND QUICKLY.
3
LET ME REPEAT. YOU MUST NOT START A FIRE, HARM THE OWNER OR CAUSE A BIG FUSS.
6
YES, SIR.
5
NOW GO, YASUTOSHI.

$9.95 U. S. First edition: June 2006



*Path of the Assassin*, called "Hanzo no Mon" in Japan, is the story of Hattori Hanzo, the fabled master ninja whose duty was to protect Tokugawa Ieyasu. Ieyasu was the shogun who would unite Japan into one great nation. But before he could do that, he had to learn about the facts of life. As the secret caretaker of such an influential future leader, not only does Hanzo use vast and varied ninja talents, but in living closely with Ieyasu, he forms a close friendship with the young shogun.

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